COUNT CAGLIOSTRO:

OR,

THE CHARLATAN.

A TALE OF

THE REIGN OF LOUIS XVI.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL I.

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CHAPTER I.

THE CARDINAL AND HIS SECRETARY.

THE apartment, in which his Eminence the Cardinal Di-Jomelli was daily wont to break his fast, was as noble and spacious a saloon as any in Italy The floor, or at least as much of it as a luxurious Turkey carpet permitted you to see, was paved with the purest marble, chequered

and diversified with different coloured lavas. The walls were hung with a fine specimen of Gobelin tapestry, while the vaulted ceiling exhibited an exquisite representation of Susannah and the Elders, by Julio Romano. Some exquisite relics of antique sculpture were tastefully disposed in different parts of the saloon, no doubt to soften and relieve the splendour of the gilded and showy furniture.

Many wise and pious people are of opinion, that it is neccssary to invest the superior clergy of a land with rank and affluence; lest they should cease to command the respect of the wealthy and refined classes of society. But those, who most insist on the necessity of ecclesiastical affluence, would certainly have been satisfied with the room in which the Cardinal was accustomed to take his morning refection. Ill-natured people might possibly have found

flaws or defects in the holy prelate's moral and religious character, but none in his palace. The most fastidious and sneering nobleman in Italy could not, with any regard to truth and candour, have affected to undervalue his Excellency's breakfast room.

The Cardinal entered the apartment with a languid air. The prelate was a stout hale man of sixty, somewhat inclining to obesity. His white hair and purple cheeks seemed to indicate that he had enjoyed to the utmost the good things which Providence had allotted to his share. His features, though somewhat thickened and animalized by excess, had been once regular and even handsome.

His secretary, a keen-looking dark-eyed little abbáte of thirty, who had been some time waiting the Cardinal's appearance, rose at his approach, and in a quiet, but insinuating man-

ner, enquired how his Eminence had passed the night.

"Pretty well—pretty well; I dosed for a couple of hours—a very fair amount of rest, when you consider the terrible excitement of the preceding evening."

The prelate had not, as some unsophisticated reader might imagine from these words, been witnessing the death-bed horrors of some noble profligate; he had not been deciding on the life or death of some half-score of heretics; he had not even been assisting at any of the more impressive or fatiguing ceremonies of the Roman Church; he had been to a concert to witness the début of a prima donna who had been engaged at his instance.

"I did not tremble much," said the secretary; "the result was not in my opinion for a moment doubtful. I knew that your Eminence's

recommendation would vindicate itself, and come forth from the trial, like pure gold from the furnace."

"Ah! my son," said the prelate with a look of kindly reproach, "you speak with the rashness of youth. But how can I blame you. I did not act myself with the caution becoming my years."

"I thought your Eminence had seen the Signora Bettoni twice, and were well assured of her surpassing talents."

"True—but consider what I risked. I had pledged myself to all Rome, that the rising glory of my youthful débutante should eclipse the meridian blaze of Madame Colnacci. All Rome was there, and aware of the fact. If she had failed, I was a lost man!—my musical reputation was gone for ever!—I could never have shown myself in the musical world again!"

" But her success was certain, after the first bar."

" Ay, but reflect my son," rejoined the Cardinal with moral solemnity, " how small an accident might have marred the happy result !—a cold, a headache, nervous agitation, a cause so trifling as to be imperceptible—nay, unknown to mortal eyes—might have blasted the great triumph. Then look at my position. The audience would have accepted no excuse, no extenuating circumstances ; and one of the Fathers of the Church would have been exposed to the ridicule and obloquy of all Rome. I shudder to look back on the danger I have escaped."

The prelate threw himself panting on a sofa, and thrusting forth one of his crimson-stockinged legs, which showed to great advantage on the yellow satin of the couch, he firmly placed the

other on a velvet footstool, and demanded his breakfast.

While the Cardinal was thus occupied, the secretary busied himself in sorting and arranging a huge pile of memorials, and other papers, seemingly with the view of presenting them to the Cardinal, when he should have finished his repast. The latter appeared to guess his secretary's intention, for he impatiently waved his hand, exclaiming—

"Don't trouble yourself, I cannot transact any business this morning; my thoughts are of another world."

With these words the Cardinal stretched himself in a still easier position on the yellow satin sofa, while his eyes assumed the lack-lustre expression indicative of profound reverie.

The secretary's eyebrows elevated themselves

with surprise on hearing the celestial nature of the Cardinal's thoughts. He endeavoured to track the direction of his intently gazing eyes, and ascertained them to be fixed on a splendidly bound breviary, which was lying on an ebony reading desk at some distance, and which, by the way, though twenty years old, looked as good as new.

"Now may I be broiled on the gridiron of St. Lawrence," thought the Abbáte, "if he is not going to celebrate a private Te Deum for the success of La Bettoni, and in that posture too!"

Notwithstanding his internal scandàl, the complaisant Abbáte rose, and was about to hand the breviary to his superior, when the Cardinal, perceiving his mistake, said, with some confusion, but more amazement—

"Nay, my son, I meant that they had wan-

dered to the realm of music—the sphere of poetry. The delicious notes of the Signora Bettoni were still thrilling on my ear, and lapping my soul in Elysium."

The wily secretary was much more confused than the Cardinal, to find that he had unintentionally been more pious than his master, and he hastened to set the latter at ease by a little elegant blasphemy.

"If your Grace's thoughts then were not occupied with Heaven, they were at least fixed on an angel."

"Good—good—I protest," said the Cardinal, chuckling with delight, and rejoiced to find, that, though profane himself, he might still lecture his secretary on profanity. "But, my son, methinks you allow your musical enthusiasm to carry you too far, and to make your wit almost border on sacrilege."

"I acknowledge my fault," said the Abbáte, submissively casting down his eyes; "but who can be near your Grace, and be otherwise than an enthusiast in that divine science?"

Before the Cardinal could answer this flattery, the door opened, and a lacquey announced that a monk of the Benedictine order craved audience of his Eminence.

"Pshaw!" said his Eminence, who was much more disposed to have given audience to a singer than an ecclesiastic. "This is too bad! before I have even finished my morning refection! We cannot always be occupied with our ecclesiastical functions. Already my constitution sinks under the fatigue: eh, Maroncelli?" said he, looking at his secretary, without whose advice he no more ventured to take any step in business, than a prince of the blood-royal, who is nominally appointed Generalissimo of an

army, dare order a movement without the sanction of the veteran at his elbow, who has been specially appointed to guide him.

"From what convent does the holy father come?" said the secretary to the lacquey.

The lacquey disappeared, and, in a moment afterwards, re-entered with the information that the stranger belonged to the convent of St. John's.

"Perhaps," said the secretary, "he brings news respecting your Eminence's niece; and if I mistake not, the nunnery adjoining St. John's contains the picture of the holy Baptist," (crossing himself) "which your Eminence so much admired, and was anxious to purchase of the good sisters. Perhaps they have despatched this monk to negociate the transaction for them. Does not your Eminence recollect the painting?"

The Cardinal's half-shut eyes opened wider and wider during this speech, till at last they actually appeared to scintillate; and, with a vivacity that ill accorded with his declaration respecting the state of his constitution, he exclaimed—

"Recollect it? Holy Virgin! I have thought of nothing else since I saw it, excepting the Signora Bettoni's début, and my attention then was rather a matter of duty, which I owed to my musical reputation, than a pleasure. Tell the good father we are ready to see him."

A short rotund-looking friar, whose face, from its extreme gravity and stupidity, looked like that of an owl, was soon ushered into the apartment.

"Do you come on the behalf of the good sisters of St. John?" said the Cardinal eagerly.

"I do," said the monk, rather surprised.

"Respecting the sale of that splendid picture—splendid, I mean," said the Cardinal, recollecting that it was not his policy to praise his intended purchase, "considering that it is the production of an obscure modern artist, of no repute whatever."

"The affair on which I am deputed, though an unworthy messenger, to consult with your Eminence, is no doubt mysteriously connected with the picture to which your Eminence alludes. But I was not aware that its sale was resolved upon."

"Then you have not come to sell the picture," said the Cardinal, looking very disappointed, and giving, at the same time, a significant glance to his secretary, which evidently said, "I shall turn the bore over to you." The Cardinal leant back in his easy chair, and shut his eyes.

"I came," said the monk, looking grievously offended at the Cardinal's somnolent attitude, "albeit an unworthy messenger, to consult with his Eminence respecting a most astonishing and important occurrence: but if his Eminence is too fatigued to hear my narrative, I had better retire."

"Stop, brother!" said the Abbáte Maroncelli, darting a hawk's-eye glance on the owl-like monk, from which the latter shrunk, as his feathered prototype would have done from a ray of the mid-day sun. "Think not, because his Eminence's eyes are outwardly shut, that their inward sense is not open. Know that, in all difficult and laborious investigations, which demand intense mental attention, such is his Eminence's uniform mode of abstracting his mind from all external impressions; whereby he is the more fully able to concentrate its

powers on the subject in hand: therefore, brother, continue your narrative without further loss of time."

The Cardinal uttered a sound, between a grunt and a snore, which testified his full assent to the secretary's explanation of his attitude.

Somewhat consoled, or else a little awed, the monk began again, in the same words and tone; for he had prepared his discourse beforehand, and was determined not, or perhaps was unable, to vary from it, however the circumstances under which he pronounced it might alter. "I came here, albeit an unworthy messenger, to consult with his Eminence, respecting a most astonishing and important occurrence, which has just happened at our monastery. Divers and manifold opinions have sprung up among our brotherhood touching the event. I myself opine, in common with many others,

that the affair savoureth of the miraculous; while a certain portion of our holy community, relying upon their gift of carnal wisdom, suggest that the alleged appearances are the result of human fraud. Others, again, hold, that the matter is an artifice exceedingly puzzling, and, indeed, altogether unaccountable. That some one of these doctrines will prove to be the true one, I entertain but little doubt; and in instituting a comparison between my own opinions and——"

"My good brother," said the secretary, determined to cut short this dreadful harangue, "with all possible deference to the opinions of the fraternity of St. John, of whose wisdom their ambassador is a very sufficient specimen and proof, I would humbly request you to relate the facts of your communication, before you favour me with your comments."

"Well, then," said the monk, rather pettishly, "it was on the eighth of last month, in the present year of our Lord, 1771, that St. John the Baptist—praised be his name!—first made his appearance in the Nunnery of St. John."

The Abbáte Maroncelli's first emotion on hearing of this astounding visit was actual terror. He thought he was conversing with a madman; and he gazed with some anxiety on the monk's face. But no—every line and feature of that unmeaning disk indicated solemn stupidity, but nothing of insanity. His next idea was that the whole affair was an attempt, by some mischievous people, to mystify the Cardinal and himself; and that this weak-headed monk, having been previously hoaxed himself, had been selected as a proper tool for the purpose. Indignant at such a supposition, he composed his features into an aspect of great severity and said—

"I am unwilling to think, that you would knowingly lend yourself to the perpetration of this insult on his Eminence; but remember that in these sacred matters, the absence of due care and pious caution is in itself a crime, and might draw down upon you a portion of that condign punishment which will assuredly overtake the original authors of this farce."

"Farce indeed!' retorted the monk, "some of the most learned and pious brethren of our monastery, whose wisdom your Reverence has just now admitted, think that the incident more resembles a sacred mystery or morality, than a farce. But be it farce, or mystery, we are neither (to use a profane comparison) authors, actors, nor even spectators, with the exception of two of our brethren, who were called in by the holy sisterhood to witness the

The Abbáte Maroncelli mused for a moment: he saw that he should gain nothing by brow-beating the monk, so he determined to restrain his temper, and sift the matter with patience.

"Nay, brother," rejoined he in a milder tone, "be not offended. I was but fearful that you had been imposed upon by some impious and malignant persons. Prithee give me an exact and detailed account of the manner in which this extraordinary vision first appeared to the sisterhood of St. John."

"It was on the first Monday of last month the 8th of July, the Signora Erminia, his Eminence's niece, whom the Convent have the honour of educating, was walking in the Conven garden, about twilight. She stooped to tye up a rose, which had been trod down. On rising, she saw the holy Baptist standing at the top of the gravel walk, about ten yards before her.

She was much frightened; but the Saint smiled graciously, and bidding her, in a sort of chaunt, not be frightened, told her to repair to the same spot on the morrow evening, an hour after vespers. He then disappeared."

The Abbáte counterfeited a patience which he certainly did not feel, and mildly enquired, eyeing the monk all the time with a glance which would have done honour to the best practitioner in Westminster Hall, "How was it, that the Signora Erminia knew that the figure she saw was St. John the Baptist?"

"That is the most wonderful part of the whole story," said the monk; "the vision so exactly resembled the picture of St. John in the Chapel—you know the painting, I think, father, —the same which his Eminence just now talked of buying—that the Signora thought the canvass had walked out of the frame. The

young lady was a good judge of the likeness, for she always exhibited a singular preference for this picture, over all the other shrines and images in the convent, and always performed her private devotions before it."

"So!" said the secretary scornfully, "a silly child of fourteen or fifteen, is allowed by the sensible sisters of St. John, to be wandering about the Convent garden, when she ought to have been counting her beads in the chapel, or sleeping in the dormitory. She falls asleep, very naturally dreams of the picture she is always looking at by day, wakes, finds herself alone, and is excessively frightened. She then very naturally tells her story, which like all dreams is exceedingly incoherent and unmeaning, to the Superior, which she very strangely believes. Upon this small egg, the pious and learned brothers of St. John condescend to sit,

until they have hatched from it a monstrous bird, which appears to have flown away with their understandings."

"Judge us not," said the monk, "until you hear the sequel. The Prioress did not at first believe the story. She reprimanded the Signora, and bade her dismiss such profane nonsense from her head; but the other persisting in her account, she, rather to calm the young lady's agitation than from any other motive, repaired to the spot at the hour, accompanied by the Signora, and half a dozen of the sisters——"

"And saw nothing," said the Abbáte, impetuously.

"Alas! reverend brother, sorry am I to contradict you; but when they arrived at the spot, there they saw St. John, exactly as he is represented on our altar-piece—a comely young man,

with a beautiful and smiling face, clothed in a raiment of goats' hair, which, flung around his body, partly disclosed his shoulders and legs, both of which limbs seemed framed after a sweet and angel-like fashion. His garment shone with a mild white light, and round his head appeared a glory of green fire."

"A glory of green fire! grant me patience," muttered the secretary. "Well, brother, what then?"

"St. John then waved his hand, and chaunted, in a low sweet tone—

"'Erminia stay,
The rest away.'

When the Prioress, and the other sisters, were so frightened, that they ran away, and tumbled over one another into the refectory, which opens into the garden."

"And the Lady Erminia?"

"Remained behind; having seen the Saint before, she was not so frightened as the rest." The monk then went on to state, that the saint disappeared as before, repeating his injunction to the Signorina to repair again to the spot on the next evening. It seems the Prioress then laid the case before her confessor; and he advised that she should again repair to the spot with the Lady Erminia, but accompanied also by two of the stoutest brethren in the monastery. The same scene appears to have been repeated, with this slight variation, that when the Saint espied the brethren, he waved them indignantly off, and shook his head, until the green glory appeared like a flame. Daunted at this appearance, they hesitated some time what steps to take. At last they summoned courage to rush up to the spot where the figure appeared to be standing, but before they could

reach the place, it had vanished. They searched, but could find no traces of any human being. The failure of this attempt to detect any bodily agency in the transaction, gave a great blow to the anti-miracle party; while the spirits of their antagonists were proportionally elated. They strongly deprecated any repetition of such impious efforts, and fervently prayed that the ridiculous and sacrilegious attempt which had been already made, to lay violent hands on the Saint, might not draw down divine vengeance on the convent. Erminia was of course looked upon with great veneration, and expected punctually to attend any appointment which St. John might vouchsafe to make with her.

Reports of the miraculous apparition of St. John, in the gardens of the convent dedicated to his name, soon began to fly about the neighbourhood; and the Prioress was much puzzled as to the style in which she ought to frame her

answers to the numerous queries, which were daily put to her on the subject. She was fully alive to the reputation, and perhaps profit, which would probably accrue to the convent from the authentication of such an extraordinary miracle. Moreover, she had seen the saint herself with her own eyes—had seen him elude the grasp of his intended captors, and vanish into thin air. She firmly believed in the reality of the appearance; but still she hesitated to publish her unqualified belief to the world. The age was violently sceptical. The nineteenth century may be indifferent to religion; but the latter end of the eighteenth was openly, and, if the expression may be allowed, ostentatiously infidel. And so much does the spirit of the age affect even those, who are most opposed to its principles, and farthest removed from its influence, that the Prioress hesitated to take upon herself the responsibility of recognizing the miracle. She

instinctively felt, that the dignitaries of her Church would be rather embarrassed than pleased at the event. In this juncture, she determined to state the circumstances to some prelate of high rank, and act upon the authority of his advice. The near relationship of Erminia to the Cardinal, naturally pointed him out to the Prioress as the proper person, to whom recourse ought to be had on the present occasion; but not particularly liking to perform the mission in her own person, she applied to the monks of the adjoining monastery, one of whom, with the permission of his superior, readily undertook the office.

We have mentioned that the Cardinal, whose interest in the monk's business had entirely ceased, when he found that the latter was not empowered to enter into any negociations respecting the sale of the coveted altar-piece, had sunk into his easy chair, and assumed a som-

nolent appearance. From this state he partially roused himself, and although his eyes were still closed, a profane person would have suspected, from sundry regulated bobbings of the head, and tappings of the fingers, that his Eminence was internally rehearsing a song. Towards, however, the end of the monk's narrative, his attention or rather curiosity had been excited by the sharpness and impatience of his secretary's tone. He gradually opened his eyes, and raising himself to an upright position in his chair, began to listen to the dialogue.

"Be assured, my brother," he heard his secretary say, "that the holy St. John, to whose name be all honour and glory, hath no part in these proceedings. To my mind they resemble rather the machinations of an evil spirit; not that I would allow you for a moment to suppose that you have actually seen any supernatural appearance. These are not times when demons

are permitted to assault and tempt the outward man with their visible presence. But I fear much, that such a spirit as I speak of hath insinuated itself into your hearts, and deluded your brains; rendering you an easy prey to human imposture; puffing up your souls with vain imaginations, until ye conceive yourselves worthy of divine intercourse with an immortal angel; you, who ought to deem yourselves too happy when allowed to grovel in the dust before his shrine."

The Cardinal saw that his secretary had, somehow or other, achieved a victory over the frightened monk, and, still retaining some spite against that individual for the disappointment which the latter had innocently occasioned him, he thought it a good opportunity to join in the farther discomfiture of the already conquered enemy.

"For vain imaginations," quoth he, "I know

of no remedy so simple and efficacious as long continued and diligent fasting: eh, Maroncelli?" and he glanced at his secretary, to ascertain whether he was proceeding after an orthodox fashion; and being encouraged by an approving look, he continued, with increased confidence and severity.

"Wherefore, my son, do thou thyself, together with all thy brethren at St. John's, abstain from all animal food during the next six weeks; excepting the healths of any of the weaker brethren, (among whom you cannot rank yourself,) my son, shall imperiously require it. Touch not at your meals any kind of vinous liquor, however diluted with the simple element. Spare not the frequent use of the scourge, and rise three times every night, repeating, during each vigil, such a number of credos and paternosters as your superior shall judge necessary. Depart, my son, depart in peace."

"But what answer," said the monk, quite aghast at this strange mode of solving the Prioress's doubts, "but what answer shall I return the Prioress?"

The Cardinal looked doubtingly at the secretary, as if to inquire the answer; but the latter, who saw that it was impossible, by mere casual prompting, to enable his master properly to support his part, determined to close the scene.

"Depart, my brother, depart in peace; fail not to macerate and mortify your outward bodies, according to his Eminence's behests; so shall your inward spirits be purified and exalted."

The monk was very reluctant to retire: he was utterly amazed at the sentence which the Cardinal had pronounced. He could not conceive how the nuns had committed a crime in involuntarily beholding a spectacle, which had caused them so much terror and uneasiness:

still less could he comprehend, why, supposing them to have been guilty of some offence, they should be allowed to expiate their sins by the vicarious suffering of his brethren and himself. It seemed strange to him, that those who had seen the apparition, and vouched for its existence, should get off scot-free, while those, who had only heard of it through them, should be thus cruelly punished.

Fain would he have argued the point a little longer; but the Cardinal and the secretary renewed their cry of "Depart in peace," in full duet, until he was obliged to make his obeisance, and retire.

After the monk had left the apartment, the Abbâte Maroncelli recounted to the Cardinal the strange story which he had just heard. It amused the prelate so much, that he bitterly regretted that he had not listened to the original narrative. He was delighted at the incident,

for three reasons : first, because it was connected with the picture, the acquisition of which, at the present moment, formed the primary object of his thoughts; secondly, whilst it was extravagant enough to afford entertainment, it was mysterious enough to provoke his wonder, and therefore well calculated to relieve the habitual ennui under which the Cardinal, like all idle and imaginative people, laboured; and thirdly, it evidently plagued and embarrassed his secretary, whose superior abilities, although he was quite aware of their value, and felt the impossibility of dispensing with their guidance, he could not altogether pardon.

"Nay, my son," said he, with an air of affected benignity and moderation, "methinks you are too harsh with these poor brethren."

Maroncelli disdained to convict the Cardinal of inconsistency, and to remind him that he himself had but five minutes ago enjoined the

monk to perform penance. He calmly observed, "I presume your Eminence does not believe in the reality of what these silly sisters fancy themselves to have seen."

"Truly, Maroncelli," maliciously replied the Cardinal, "I will not hazard any rash decision; here are nearly a dozen, living, impartial, credible eye-witnesses, who all depose to the same fact, agree in their testimony, and have no apparent motive in lending themselves to any deception. There are many miracles performed by saints occupying a distinguished place in our calendar, which have been received by our Holy Church upon much slighter evidence."

"Had the whole convent come forward as ye-witnesses, it would not have increased the credibility of the story, and would only have aggravated the scandal."

"Why, my son, you are as sceptical as the English heretic who wrote a book to prove, that

the man who saw a miracle, ought rather to believe that his senses were deceived, than that the laws of nature had varied from their ordinary course."

"A moment's reflection will convince your Eminence of the infinite detriment, which such occurrences as the present, are likely to inflict upon the Church. The story, which this senseless friar has just told, bears upon its face every mark of imposture. But were it otherwise,—were the evidence of its truth so strong, as to produce upon our minds the awful conviction that one of the immortal band of Heaven had really manifested himself to us, humble dwellers on the earth, the interest of our Church would require us to bury the event in profound silence. The present age has produced Voltaire, Helvetius, and a whole crowd of minor infidels—it is indeed a stiff-necked and unbelieving generation. Proclaim a miracle to our modern race

of philosophers and free-thinkers, and though one arose from the dead to attest it, they would give it no credence. They would only use it as an instrument to cast discredit upon those miraculous occurrences, which were received by the piety of former ages, as your Eminence observes, upon much slighter testimony."

"You remind me," said the Cardinal, who, while he was quite convinced of the sound policy of his secretary's views, took a puerile pleasure in keeping up his teazing opposition, "you remind me of one of the French kings, who conceiving certain miraculous cures worked at a particular tomb to be productive of scandal to the Church, shut it up, and forbad the performance of farther miracles. Did not some profane wit write over the gates—

"Defendu par le roi au Dieu
De faire miracle en ce lieu"?

The secretary resolved to adopt another mode of managing the Cardinal.

"As the likeness," said he, "which the nuns fancied the fictitious apparition bore to the altarpiece in their chapel, seems to me one of the strongest points of the imposture, the sooner this unlucky picture is got rid of, the quicker the whole affair will be forgotten. Your Eminence could not act a kinder part to the sisters, than by proposing to purchase the painting at the price you have already named. I will pledge myself to induce them to accept the offer.

The Cardinal seized the bait.

"True, very true," said he, "I commend your policy, and the picture will now be doubly interesting from the legend connected with it."

"But your Eminence will observe," said the secretary with a significant smile, "that every

trace of superstition respecting the picture, must first be eradicated from the minds of the sisters; or you might as well ask them to part with the convent."

"True—true," replied the Cardinal; "my son, I never for a moment doubted either your zeal, or your ability to serve the true interests of the Church; any little objections I may have made, were thrown out rather for the purpose of unfolding your reasons, and developing your plans, than with a view of offering them any serious opposition."

It was finally arranged between the Cardinal and his secretary, that the latter should set off instantly for the convent of St. John, which was situated a few miles from Rome, with full powers to examine into the miracle, to detect and punish the authors of the imposture, and above all to effect the purchase of the picture.

CHAPTER II.

THE APPARITION HUNT.

Arrived at the convent, the Abbáte Maroncelli immediately commenced a vigorous investigation of all the circumstances connected with the singular imposture which had been played on the sisters of St. John. His first care was to examine the picture which the apparition was declared so minutely to resemble.

The freshness and brilliancy of the colours proved that it had been recently painted; otherwise, from the skill with which the artist had

imitated the style of Raphael, it might have been mistaken for a genuine production of that great master. Indeed, had the tone of the colouring been properly lowered, and the whole picture been judiciously smoked and dirtied, it would no doubt have been joyfully purchased at the price of thousands, by some wealthy idolater of the old masters. Perhaps some such idea had suggested itself to the Cardinal, and accounted for his eagerness to obtain the work.

Both figure and face were graceful and beautiful in the extreme; but unsuited in the Abbáte's opinion to the character they were intended to represent. He thought the expression savoured more of mortal voluptuousness than of celestial love. "Fitter for a Ganymede than a St. John," muttered Maroncelli, as he contemplated the picture, and resolved that no time should be lost in transferring it to the Cardinal's gallery. Having thus made himself

intimately acquainted with the features delineated in the painting, he repaired to the adjoining monastery, and accurately scrutinized the visage of each individual monk; but not the smallest glimpse of resemblance could he discover. He returned to the nunnery, and examined the face of every nun, but without any better success. He enquired whether any repairs had been lately executed on any part of the monastery, and whether, if for that, or any similar purpose, workmen or strangers of any description had been lately admitted?

To all these, and many other questions of the same nature, a positive distinct negative was returned. The Abbáte ran about the monastery, from place to place, like a staunch hound, when he cannot get upon the scent; but all in vain. No trap door, or secret passage, could he detect. Not an outlet or aperture could he find, on which he could reasonably hang a sus-

picion. Finally he examined an old man, who occasionally officiated as gardener. He was retained in the service of the convent, partly out of charity, partly out of regard to his skill as a florist. He was long since past his labour; but his horticultural knowledge was considerable, and he served to direct and regulate the vigorous but unscientific diggings and rakings of the lay-sisters.

The Abbáte questioned him with regard to his knowledge of the singular transaction which had lately distracted the convent. But he evidently knew nothing but what he had learnt from the sisters, who worked under his superintendance in the garden. The Abbáte then asked him whether he had lately had any visitors at his cottage, and above all, whether he had, on any pretext whatsoever, admitted any person to the garden of the convent.

The old man answered both questions with simplicity, and in the negative.

Maroncelli thought he remarked a considerable degree of nervous agitation about the old man, as he responded to the latter queries; but shrewd and suspicious as he was, he could not deny to himself, that the old man's agitation more probably arose from the timidity of old age, than from the confusion of conscious guilt. The supposition that the hoary decrepid old man had himself enacted any part in the imposture, was of course preposterous. Neither had he intended to suppress any circumstances which he believed of consequence; but tired and frightened at the number of questions put to him, he had answered some in the negative to stop farther enquiry. For instance, he never stated, that for the last three weeks he had entertained his nephew, a youth of about eigh-

teen, who had been apprenticed to an engraver at Florence. The lad, who, by the by, had disappeared two days previous to the Abbáte's arrival, suddenly entered his cottage one day, and after relating that the cruelty of his master at Florence had forced him to abscond from his apprenticeship, he begged his uncle for food and shelter, until he could find some employment.

His old relative consented. His cottage was isolated; no visitor ever came near it. The old man suffered from loneliness; besides, the services of the youth might be useful to him. In fact, he had, on one or two occasions, when indisposed himself, and when he knew all the sisters were engaged at their devotions, sent Giuseppe, dressed in his own attire, into the garden to finish some work, which required more strength than he could exert in his languid state. But then he had very strong reasons for

believing that his nephew was not in any manner concerned in the affair under discussion. There was nothing prophetic or supernatural about the lad's appearance; nor did he, to his knowledge, resemble St. John. Besides, he did not feel assured, that he himself might not be censurable for sheltering a runaway apprentice.

He saw that any piece of information afforded, produced a host of fatiguing consecutive queries, while complete ignorance on any point terminated the investigation: and, with the cautious and cunning selfishness of old age, he determined not to answer questions which he felt certain would produce no profit to himself, and which he could not persuade himself were of any importance to those who put them.

A simple negative will often baffle the most acute cross-examination. Let the advocate touch but the slightest clue; let him grasp but

the smallest thread of the tangled matter, and he will quickly unravel the most intricate knot. But a flat denial of all knowledge of the affair, cuts away the ground on which the examinant must place his instruments of investigation. State to an arithmetician three terms of a proposition, and he will tell you the fourth. Show a naturalist a single bone, and from it he will infer the structure, habits, and history of the animal from which it is taken. Allow the mathematician his postulata, and he will push his deductions to the verge of infinity; but where all the points of a problem are unknown, Œdipus himself could not discover the solution.

Baffled, but not disheartened, the Abbâte renewed his efforts. He requested to be shown the exact spot in the garden where the apparition had disappeared. A small cluster of low bushes, quite incapable of concealing a man, was pointed out. The Abbâte was about to

.tu n away, when he was struck with the dead and withered state of the leaves of the centre bush. This circumstance, slight as it was, immediately arrested his attention. He plunged into the middle of the shrubs, and soon discovered that the withered bush was not fixed in the earth, but that a large circular hole, of about four feet deep, had been dug beneath it, while the loose bush, together with a little furze, and other rubbish, had evidently been placed over the mouth of the hole for the purposes of concealment. The Abbáte pointed out the circumstance, with bitter derision, to the nuns, who were covered with confusion.

The suspicions of the Abbáte as to the imposture were now made evident. But there still remained circumstances which could not be satisfactorily explained. An outrage of the most daring and profane cast, which would subject the offender, if discovered, to severe

punishment, had been committed, without any imaginable motive, except levity of disposition, and recklessness of consequences. Above all, the perfect and exact likeness, which the nuns, one and all, declared to exist between the apparition and the picture in the chapel, exceedingly puzzled the Abbáte. That an ideal portrait should happen to resemble any living personage was an extraordinary coincidence, but that this particular individual should chance to come to the immediate vicinity of the picture,—that he, and nobody else, should become acquainted with the similarity,—and that he should then avail himself of the circumstance for the purpose of playing such an useless, profane, and dangerous prank,—constituted a series of contingencies which was utterly incredible.

The Abbáte now turned his attention to his patron's niece, and elicited from the nuns, with

his usual ability, the minutest details respecting her disposition, habits, and conduct.

When the Cardinal placed his niece as a pupil at the Convent of St. John, an establishment noted for the severity of its discipline, everybody wondered at his choicc. The fat and lean kine in Pharaoh's dream were not more different than the Abbess and the Prelate: for, to do the latter justice, he was not one of those persons who, luxurious themselves, preach mortification and abstinence to the rest of the world. On the contrary, after enjoyment in his own person of a feast, his next greatest pleasure was to witness its enjoyment by others. But when it was discovered that the convent contained among its inmates some nuns who were great proficients in the musical art, the world began to comprehend his motive, though they still continued to be surprised at his choice.

For it was anticipated, that the ascetic edu-

cation of the convent would create a character very distasteful to the Cardinal. Nevertheless, the gloom and austerity of Erminia's preceptresses did not produce the expected effects on her young mind. In vain an old nun, with a peaked and purple nose, and a mouth whose corners were drawn down into the sourest of all possible angles, talked to her by the hour together of disease and death, of the certainty of dissolution to age, of its possibility to youth. How make a girl, whose pulses were throbbing with the electric blood of fifteen, comprehend the nature of death? In vain did her lugubrious instructress describe the world as a den of misery, governed, or rather desolated, by a sex whom she likened to ravenous lions, prowling about, and seeking whom they might devour. Erminia only felt the more contented with her present retreat. In vain did the Abbess, under the name of the flesh-pots of

Egypt, proscribe all the ordinary comforts of life. In vain did she stigmatize the most innocent games and recreations, as profane and scandalous diversions. Erminia needed not either. With such perfection of youthful health was she endowed, that mere existence was a luxury. A simple breath of the fresh fragrant air of morning, afforded her a sentiment of enjoyment, which a Sybarite might well have envied. She sighed not for the pleasures of a world she had never known, or heard of only to abhor. She pined not for amusement; in fact she had plenty. It was a sufficient excitement to her unworn susceptible mind, to tend the flowers in the garden—to watch the progress of their growth and beauty, and to lament their decay. Then there were the pictures in the chapel—there was the Virgin Mary and her child, and, above all, the picture of the youthful St. John.

Before the latter picture had arrived at the convent, she had been very fond of contemplating the Holy Mother and Child; but now the picture of St. John absorbed all her devotion. She could never sufficiently admire the youthful saint,—the speaking eloquence of those soft dark eyes, that seemed to say a thousand things, and say them all for her!—The ineffable tenderness of that beautiful half smile, which just curved his lips,—the exquisite symmetry of those sweet limbs, which seemed indeed formed after God's own image.

No sun-worshipper ever watched his rising divinity with half the quiet adoration and intense contentment with which Erminia for hours contemplated her favourite saint. In vain did the Abbess banish, as she thought, every trace of pleasure from her dominion. Every moment, not spent in prayer and sleep, was to Erminia spent in amusement, and even the performance

of her religious exercises gave her the delightful sense of satisfied duty. Was she not happy—supremely happy? Yet the convent walls, that held the contented Erminia, were not in truth so beautiful or so romantic as the "horrid and unrelenting shrines" which surrounded the wretched Eloisa. Alas! when will men learn that happiness must be found in their own minds? When the pleasures they already possess cease to delight their diseased spirits, they never suspect that the fault is within—in their own blunted susceptibilities, but strive, with frantic eagerness, to increase their external means of enjoyment; forgetful that the heart, soured by disappointment, and scarred with ancient wounds, carries with it, through every change of scene, its own gloomy atmosphere; and, though transported to the brightest bower in paradise, would still find all blank and barren.

But a change had come over Erminia since the affair of the apparition. She became melancholy, absent, and moping. She no longer contemplated her favourite picture with her usual adoration. Nay, some of the nuns declared, that she could not even behold it without shuddering; and one went so far as to aver, that she had actually found the young lady stretched on the cold flags before the mysterious picture, in a trance or fainting fit. None of these circumstances,—not the smallest or most insignificant, were lost upon the Abbáte. Without mentioning his own suspicions or conjectures to the sisters, he immediately subjected Erminia to a series of searching and long protracted examinations;—with what result will be seen in the following pages.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRETARY'S REPORT.

THE Cardinal was sitting alone in his library, not poring over the works of the Fathers, but conning over the score of a new opera; while ever and anon he hummed a bar, and then refreshed his vocal pipe from a decanter of choice wine, which stood on a small table beside him.

A valet announced the return of his secretary. The Cardinal intimated that he should like to see him as soon as possible.

Without waiting either to take refreshment, or even to divest his apparel of the traces of the journey he had just finished, Maroncelli made his appearance.

"Welcome, Maroncelli; have you got the picture?"

"I have, your Eminence."

"Thrice welcome! my incomparable secretary, you are an universal genius, as skilful in executing a negotiation as wise in devising the plan;—as cunning in judging a picture as learned in composing a sermon." (The wine and music had elevated his Eminence's spirits.) "But at what price were you forced to purchase the gem."

"I gave a hundred crowns," said the secretary, who did not seem inspired with his patron's spirits.

"A hundred crowns!—what, let it go for a hundred crowns!—the pious excellent old addle-

heads! I suppose a square yard of painted canvas was to them a square yard of painted canvas under all circumstances, no matter whether done by Raphael, or the village sign-painter. Good lack! good lack! I wonder whether they can tell a rose from an onion? And where, my son, would you advise me to hang this admirable production?"

"In the centre of the hottest fire in your palace," emphatically replied the secretary.

"Maroncelli!" said the Cardinal, looking aghast, "do I hear you aright? No man loves a jest—that is, a seasonable jest on a proper subject—better than myself; but I do not like to hear a serious matter treated with levity. My taste in pictures has never yet been questioned by the greatest geniuses in Rome."

"Heaven is witness, that I am in no humour for levity," said the secretary gravely; "your

Eminence must prepare yourself for a great blow."

The Cardinal clasped his hands together. "I foreboded how it would be; you have defaced the picture!"

"The picture is the same as when it left the painter's easel——"

"Thank God!"

"My communication relates to your Eminence's niece, the Lady Erminia."

"What of her?—has she got the small-pox?—has her voice broke? What has happened?—speak out man."

The secretary made no answer.

"Speak out," cried the Cardinal starting from his easy chair; "tell me the worst—is she dead?"

"Would to God she were," answered the Abbáte looking upwards; "better that she had

died in her sinless innocency, than that she had lived to fall a prey to the demon of seduction."

"You rave, Maroncelli; my niece is in the centre of the strictest convent in Italy, surrounded by high walls, and by a circle of nuns, more impregnable than any fortress. What harm should reach her?"

"It is natural for your Eminence to hold this language; but alas! there is no spot of ground in this bad world, however fenced in and guarded, which the villainy of mankind, aided by the malice of Satan, will not penetrate."

"You speak riddles," said the Cardinal, pacing up and down the room with agitated steps; "tell me in plain language what has befallen my niece?"

"I have satisfied myself," replied the secretary, "that the pretended apparition was—I will not call him the Signora Erminia's lover—but a vile daring impostor, who availing himself

of her unsuspecting purity, and the ineffable folly of her guardians, has contrived to bereave the unhappy lady of her happiness and innocence."

"These treacherous stupid old women shall answer for it," cried the Cardinal passionately; "I would not educate her in my own palace, though worse could not have happened there.—No—for years I have deprived myself of the society of that sweet child, who brought to me my departed sister's image, young and beautiful even as I knew her in my boyish days; I sacrificed all this, and placed her in yonder accursed convent, that she might be better and happier than myself, or than I could make her. And now what is the result?—but these veiled Jezabels shall answer for it; I will have them all buried alive!"

"Your Eminence will pardon me," calmly remarked the secretary, "but I do not think

you could convict the abbess or her nuns of any participation in the offence. I believe at this moment they are wholly unconscious of the mischief which has occurred. The Signora Erminia seems the only person who could, according to ecclesiastical law, be sentenced to that awful death."

The Cardinal wanted an object on which to vent his passion, and he found it in this remark of his secretary. He suddenly stopped short in his walk, and began with affected composure.—

"Maroncelli, you know that I entered the Church not from inclination, but because my family had the power to make me a cardinal; whatever may be my disposition, my sense of honour to my order will always prevent me from either disgracing or betraying it. I say, it must be no slight pressure that drives me to do either of these things; but rather," continued he, stamping furiously, "than sanction the cold-

blooded atrocity to which you dare allude—rather than allow one hair of that girl's head to be scathed, I would tear off my cardinal's robes in the middle of St. Peter's, and hurl the rags in the Pope's face. I was born a man before I was made a cardinal!

The secretary listened to his excited patron with a cold marble-like indifference. He was a man of many talents, and numberless ideas; but he had only two animating motives—ambition for himself, and the class to which he belonged. Far from being affected by the trait of tenderness which circumstances had thus developed in a character otherwise so sensual and selfish,—he looked upon it with infinite contempt, as an explosion of maudlin tenderness. "Your Eminence," said he, "misunderstands me, I only stated the law; I never for a moment contemplated its application to any party in this unfortunate affair. Even were I

destitute of pity for the Signora's extreme youth and heedless unsuspecting innocence—were I devoid of sympathy for my benefactor's family, I should dread the scandal which would result to the Church, from the adoption of such a course; I deprecate all punishment inflicted on ecclesiastics, or their protegées. It is far more important to mankind, that the reputation of the Holy Church should be preserved pure and spotless, than that every offence committed by its ministers should be adequately chastised."

"Pooh! pooh!" cried the Cardinal, "I wish my niece's reputation were as safe as the church's."

"Both may be saved by following the plan I shall mark out. Send the Lady Erminia to your distant estate at Perugia."

The Cardinal nodded approbation.

"Permit me," resumed the secretary, "to remind your Eminence, that near this same estate, there is a benefice within your gift which

has been sometime vacant; your Eminence has more than once half promised it to me. I could take possession, while I superintend the interests of the Lady Erminia."

The Cardinal smiled, in spite of his vexation, as he replied: "The opportunity you choose is irresistible; your request is granted. But to return to our first subject, why do you recommend its destruction?"

"By some most mysterious coincidence, this fatal picture is really and truly [illegible]ct portrait of the impostor, who hath sinned so grievously against your Eminence. The Lady Erminia cannot see it without going into fits."

"But shall we not thereby destroy all clue to the rascal's detection?"

"And what would that avail us?" said the wily secretary; "I want no discovery—no detection:—I wish to bury the whole affair in the most impenetrable secresy."

"You are right, my son," said the Cardinal, with a reluctant sigh, "I will order the picture to be burnt, after I have looked at it once more. Alas ! how one misfortune entails another !"

From this period our story contains no farther records of the Cardinal.

From an obscure history of the time we can gather, that, four or five years after the events narrated in the foregoing pages, the Cardinal was appointed ambassador from the Pope to his most Christian Majesty, Louis the Sixteenth, who had just ascended the French throne : and, in this capacity, he appears, during his residence at Paris, to have concluded a match extremely advantageous to his niece, and a treaty of commerce remarkably disadvantageous to his country.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOVER'S TASK.

WHO has not heard of the *petit soupers* of Paris? Who has not longed to be present in some of those brilliant saloons, where the costliest inventions and most refined luxuries, that modern art can create for lavish wealth, formed but the smallest portion of the scene's attraction? Where wit and beauty, genius and rank, philosophy and opulence, combined their various splendours into one bright galaxy, beneath whose lustre fashion seemed to lose her frivolity; and pleasure, freed

from the incumbrance of folly, displayed fascinations, that might almost have justified the doctrines of Epicurus. This is no exaggerated description of the Assembly which was held at the Hotel de Mirbot. The party consisted of a score of the highest noblesse of France, together with some of the most celebrated literary men of the day. Condorcet, Diderot, Grimm, and Marmontel, were present; and the rest of the company apparently inspired by these distinguished guests, displayed a degree of wit and information that seemed almost incompatible with the indolence and frivolity in which their lives had been passed. Yet, though the conversation was such as the most fastidious of intellectual epicures might have reckoned a feast, it seemed to have no attractions for two of the more patrician guests, who sat somewhat apart from the rest of the company, heedless of the brilliant sallies, ingenious reasonings, and lively

anecdotes, which circulated round the table. Their inattention was the more remarkable, as they did not seem to find much excitement in their own society. One of them, a very lovely woman of four and thirty, sat listening with an ennuyée air to the courtly, but vapid compliments, her assiduous cavalier incessantly addressed to her. "I cannot divine what could have induced you, Count,—you, who are the politest man, in the politest city of the world," said the lady, with a smile, ironical indeed, but so beautiful, that it seemed to captivate her admirer's fancy, even more than it wounded his *amour propre*, "to offer your homage to one, who, as my good-natured friend, Madame Verneuil, observes, values herself on her rudeness; talks of her violations of etiquette as so many titles to your esteem, and challenges for her defects a respect and consideration, which others do not presume to claim for their accomplishments."

"I assure you, Marchioness," returned the Count D'Ostalis, in some confusion, "Madame Verneuil never mentions your name, but as your other friends do, with love and admiration; that is, at least not to me. Had she so sinned against truth and good taste, I am afraid I should have lost that reputation for good breeding of which you speak."

"I did not charge you with having listened to the satire,—and remember, Count, he proves his guilt who defends himself before he is accused; but let that pass"—continued she, scornfully tossing her head, "and give a categorical answer to my question."

"Ah! Madame," exclaimed the Count, "assuming a sentimental air, and throwing himself into an elaborately graceful attitude—" can I assign any other than that which all Paris has celebrated? But how shall I describe what painters and poets—"

"Stop!" said the Marchioness, "if you utter a word about the irresistible influence of my charms, or call yourself beauty's slave, or address me with any of your Corydon phrases —if, to use your own words, you do so sin against truth and good taste: I shall probably behave much more uncourteously than you did to Madame Verneuil."

"Did! Madame!" repeated the Count with an expostulatory sigh.

"No more of that," said she imperiously, "for I think—yes—I am almost—nay, quite sure I have come to a resolution to renounce your friendship."

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed the Count, with a start which displayed much more elegance than passion, "what can have induced such a barbarous determination? Do you doubt the sincerity of my devotion?"

"Oh not at all! or what is the same thing, I

do not consider it worth while to ascertain its nature; I only doubt your ability to amuse me."

"I admit my personal unworthiness to hold that charming office," said the Count, with an air of consummate conceit; "nevertheless, I hoped, that my profound admiration, and fervent desire to please, might atone for my deficiencies; even as the offering at the shrine receives value rather from the intention of the donor, than its own intrinsic richness."

"I doubt, whether those who profit by the shrine would allow your doctrine to be orthodox."

"Ay! but it is not the priest, but the saint, to whom I address my orisons; besides, Madame, to continue my metaphor, if indeed it be one when applied to you, the sternest divinities deign to indicate the means by which their favour may be acquired. Would it not then

become the Marchioness de Montolieu to reveal the mode by which she may be propitiated?"

"Well, then," replied the lady laughing, "lest you should inflict on me a third edition of that insufferable simile, I will apprize you in one word what constitutes my greatest delight—novelty. I am tired of everything and every person that now surrounds me." (The Count of course interposed a parenthetical sigh.) "I want new ideas, new sensations, new characters, new pleasures; and if you wish to please me, you must gratify this desire."

"Alas! Madame, how can I hope to amuse one whom the present company has failed to entertain?"

The Marchioness's eye wandered round the table as she replied. "Against Diderot I will say nothing, he talks even better than he writes; but then he has offended me: as to Marmontel, he is a cold, insipid, prating pedant: Grimm's great

abilities will not make me pardon his greater coxcombry; Condorcet's reasonings are so close, so exact, so admirable, that they make my head ache; and as for the rest, they are neither wiser nor wittier than ourselves, Count."

"This admirable criticism, Madame, instructs me, delights me, but it also terrifies me. Yet it is but what I might have expected from one who was the correspondent of Voltaire, and whose genius compelled even the republican Franklin to adopt the language of a courtier."

"Miserable man! do you hope to recommend yourself by reminding me of my misfortunes?—Yes—Voltaire is dead—he had consented to assist at a soirée to which I had invited all Paris; but three days before the glorious evening arrived, the patriarch had ceased to exist, save in his immortal works. Europe lost her mightiest genius, and my party its chief orna-

ment. Dreadful! And Franklin too!—that charming old man! he has also left France; oh, what wisdom! what wit! Never shall I forget, Count, the pithy reply he made to you at Madame D'Olcy's."

"I do not recollect it, Madame," replied Count D'Ostalis, with more pique than he had yet betrayed.

"Oh! then, I will recal it to your memory," said the Marchioness, with a malicious smile; "you will remember, my dear Count, that you addressed to him one of those graceful flowery unmeaning speeches with which you so often favour me, and you concluded by observing, 'what a sublime drama America was acting in the sight of all Europe.' The admirable Franklin drily replied, 'True, but the spectators pay nothing.' Ha! ha! Positively, Count, you must find or invent something or somebody, which is

capable of filling the vacuum which the loss of these two great geniuses has left in my imagination."

"I frankly confess the task exceeds my powers," replied the Count.

"No matter; I have pronounced the irrevocable fiat, and it must be obeyed."

"Trembling at my own audacity," said the Count, tapping his snuffbox; "I venture to ask if the assumption of such absolute sovereignty is quite consistent in the admirer of the republican Franklin?"

The Marchioness laughed in some confusion, but soon replied. "There is no liberty, no equality, no justice, in the relations of the two sexes. We are either tyrants or slaves, tormentors or victims, deceivers or dupes. In this delightful conjugation, I choose to be the verb active: you admit I have the power?"

The Count slapped the left side of his satin waistcoat, and exclaimed: "Ay! Madam, you have indeed a right divine over this susceptible bosom."

"Then I will use it," said the Marchioness, imperiously clenching her small white hand, as though in the act of grasping a sceptre; "and I shall regard any—the slightest, the most humble expostulation, as an insufferable infringement on my indefeasible privilege. We shall meet this day week at Madame de Breteuil's; shall we not, Count?"

"We shall, Madame, unless I expire under your despotic rigour in the interval."

"Good," replied the Marchioness, "now hear me—if, by that time, you have not performed the command I imposed on you, I solemnly promise to forswear your acquaintance, and vow an eternal enmity. No reply. And

now let us listen or appear to listen to the discourse which Marmontel is delivering, or he will write another volume of 'Moral Tales' on purpose to lampoon us."

"Marchioness," said the Count, with the true flourish of a Frenchman, "what you command is impossible; nevertheless you shall be obeyed."

CHAPTER V.

SEARCH AFTER NOVELTY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the piece of rhodomontade with which Count D'Ostalis ornamented his promise; in reality he entertained very little doubt of his ability to perform it. His own imagination he conceived to be fertile; and even if that failed, he felt certain that an inexhaustible supply of novelty might without difficulty be discovered in the city of Paris. On arriving at his hotel, he sat down, and endeavoured to devise some new amusement, some unheard-of

pastime, which might catch the imagination of the volatile Marchioness. Nothing could be easier; but he was astonished to find that his efforts were not crowned with success. He turned over in his mind various whimsical plans for fêtes champêtres, soirées, and masques. Some of them, he thought, might even please his fastidious mistress; but to all of them existed the fatal objection that they were not new. He could not imagine a single device or conception, which had not been put into execution by other people. Every path had been already traversed. Go where he would, think what he would, mankind had been beforehand with him. He slapped his forehead, muttered an execration at his inexplicable dulness, and retired to bed, at last, in the expectation that sleep would restore the usual liveliness of his faculties.

The next day he renewed his exertions, but to as little purpose as on the preceding evening.

He began to lose confidence in his own originality; and to regard invention as a more difficult process than he had hitherto imagined.

As he turned over a book, from which he had been vainly striving to glean a suggestion, or plagiarize an idea, his attention was arrested by the remark, that necessity is the mother of invention. Self-love grasped at the excuse as eagerly as a drowning man catches at straws. "Behold a great truth," exclaimed he, with delight; "this explains the mystery; this accounts for my dulness; if necessity alone can produce invention, no wonder that a rental of ninety thousand livres should render a man's creative powers somewhat languid. Truly, I have not experienced much of that plebeian evil, necessity. I took the trouble to be born; and rank, riches, and pleasure, have ever since rewarded the exertion. Aha! I see my course. I must betake myself to some

poor devil, who lives by his wits; and a few louis will no doubt prove a more efficient inspiration to him, than the smiles of my beautiful Marchioness have been to me."

He applied to men of taste and virtû, to connoisseurs, actors, and projectors. Their promises inspired him with the liveliest admiration, but their performances made him ready to send them to the Bastile. They were even more hackneyed and common-place than his own; and the Count perceived that poverty had not even the solitary advantage which he erroneously attributed to it. "I see how it is," quoth he, "there is no terra-incognita in the world of pleasure. Perhaps, however, men have been less ardent in the pursuit of truth. I will address myself to philosophers, and men of science, and try if they cannot furnish me with novelty. The Marchioness affects to pre-

fer utility to amusement, and will be ashamed to disapprove of my taste."

With these views, he repaired to some eminent scientific men with whom he was acquainted, and intimated his willingness to contribute a large sum to the advancement of philosophy, if they would privately communicate to him any discovery which they might have in petto, before it was made known to the public. They inquired the motive of his request,—and receiving the Count's promise, that he would not reveal their communications to more than one person, for whose secresy he would be answerable, they readily laid before him some important discoveries, which had been lately made in different departments of science.

With some difficulty the Count was made to understand their nature, and was extremely mortified to perceive, in what a very small addition to the amount of truth already known

the present discoveries consisted. He asked if they were not acquainted with some new art or invention, which would produce an immediate practical effect on society, and excite the curiosity and interest of the uninitiated?

One of the philosophers, who seemed to guess his feelings, observed: "The discoveries which are now submitted to your notice, and of which you seem to think so little, will, nevertheless, be sufficient to immortalize my friend Lavoisier. As for those inventions, which form epochs in the history of the world, and change the whole face of society, know that they are seldom, if ever, the produce of a single individual. Their first germs are often the result of chance—often spring up in some inferior mind, who knows not their value. The idea is seized, and improved on by some stronger intellect. In this manner it is transplanted, from mind to mind, until it gradually

ripens into some wondrous art, that opens a new world to man. Such was probably the origin of printing, gun-powder, and the mariner's compass. Such an origin, at least, is the only mode by which we can account for the inexplicable mystery that envelopes their authors."

"Prodigiously learned!" thought the Count, suppressing a yawn; "but mighty unsatisfactory, to a person who has only two days left to hit upon a novelty."

With compliments on his lip, smiles on his brow, and disappointment in his heart, the Count bowed himself out of the learned circle, and ordered his coachman to drive to Diderot.

To this celebrated genius the Count related his adventures, and concluded by requesting his assistance.

"Monsieur le Comte," exclaimed Diderot, laughing, "I will explain the whole affair.

The Marchioness de Montolieu, having predetermined to break with you, has imposed on you a task, which she knows cannot be performed. With me she has already proclaimed irreconcileable hostility, under a less colourable pretext."

"And yet, Monsieur Diderot, I have heard you extolled for your originality."

"True, some people have been so complaisant, or so witless, as to praise me on those grounds; but, for myself, I disclaim all pretensions so ridiculous. There is nothing new under the sun. All that the greatest genius could do—all that Voltaire did—was to recombine and arrange the ideas of those who have preceded him, and to adapt them to the wants and feelings of the age. All novelty is but oblivion."

The Count was once more thrown on his own

resources, and once more commenced his researches. A calculating boy gave him hopes for a moment; but he recollected that his imperious mistress hated arithmetic. An infant musical genius at another time excited his attention; but then he called to mind that similar prodigies had been presented to the Marchioness, and that she had detected the last to be a dwarf of three times his pretended age. The Count was in despair—not at the prospect of disappointing the Marchioness, or incurring her anger—but at the idea of confessing his inability to satisfy her requisition.

"This is worse than a basilisk hunt,"* muttered the baffled Count. "What sort of monster would this lovely savage wish me to procure? Does she wish me to find a patriot minister—a virtuous opera dancer—a modest

* See Voltaire's pretty tale of *Zadig*.

author—an honest farmer-general—or a reasonable beauty? Bah! I am getting as cynical as herself. A new amusement, forsooth!—Morbleu! if I had blurted out the truth, after her own uncivilized fashion, I should have told her that she had exhausted the pleasures of folly, and was incapable of tasting the delights of wisdom. What excuse shall I make? Let me consider. Madame la Marquise, all novelty is but oblivion—the difficulty of furnishing this desideratum, will be in exact proportion to the acquirements of the individual to whom it is presented. If, then, I have been unable to supply the Marchioness de Montolieu, I can at least aver, in my defence, that I have only failed where it was impossible to succeed.—Good—I think that must touch her. Yet I know not—she is such a tigress—so ferocious—and yet so beautiful."

CHAPTER VII.

CONSOLATION AND COUNSEL.

Wearied with the fatigue he had undergone, vexed at his failure in the frivolous project he had undertaken, the Count began to think of abandoning the attempt, and providing himself with consolation. He had a thousand friends, who would either have moralized, or rallied him on the subject; but he had not the least wish to hear them.

What he wanted was a patient listener, who could allow him to expatiate on his misfortunes.

This was what the Count d'Ostalis understood by consolation. Among all his acquaintance, he knew but one such person; and he, it will very readily be believed, was not a Frenchman.

Reginald Cleveland was an Englishman of good fortune, and high family, who had for some years permanently resided in Paris. The singularity of his disposition, or rather the extreme contrast which it presented to the prevailing characters of the nation amongst whom he was situated, had obtained for him a sort of notoriety; and his company was much sought, in the highest circles of the French capital. Young, (at least his age did not appear to exceed thirty), rich, handsome, talented, he seemed formed to enjoy, more keenly than another, the delights of the gay city, in which he had placed

himself; yet he moved through each scene of pleasure, as if only to exhibit his indifference.

Possessed of great conversational powers, he let slip the fairest and most legitimate opportunities of display; and it was not until pointedly appealed to, that he betrayed his extraordinary natural eloquence, and extensive range of information. Was this timidity? The idea seemed incompatible with the air of perfect self-possession which characterized his manner. Was it excess of pride, that made him disdain the applause of a petty coterie? It could hardly be, for he listened with patience and affability to the prosiest talkers of Paris. He was the idol of all the bores; and it was insinuated that, to the support of this influential party, he owed his success in society. With many of the professed geniuses of the day, he was not quite

so popular. They admitted his general capacity, and even allowed him the possession of some wit, but doubted his taste. They averred that he had no true relish for intellectual society. They did not deny that he ostensibly paid his due quota of admiration; but they doubted whether his veneration was sincere. At least, he appeared languid and unexcited in their company; nay, one of the exacting wits hinted, with some indignation, his suspicion, that he had detected Cleveland exerting himself not to be bored with some of the most brilliant society in Paris. Be this as it might, Cleveland's manners were studiously polite. If an utter indifference to his companions' applause was at times unpleasantly obvious, he seemed determined to give no tangible cause for offence. The same apathy of manner pervaded even his demeanour to the fair sex. Though endowed

with mental and personal attractions, which, if skilfully played off, would, in the dissipated circles of France, have produced conquests without number, as rapid as that which dictated Cæsar's celebrated boast, of simultaneously arriving, beholding, and conquering, Cleveland seemed unconscious of his powers. When, indeed, some enterprising dames made such attacks, as left him no alternative but to fight or fly, he met their advances with a graceful and unembarrassed gallantry. But amid his most pointed attentions, and choicest compliments, there lurked an air of self-possession, so different from the eagerness of passion, that the most superficial observer must have seen, that the occupation was to him what leading a forlorn-hope is to a soldier, a matter of honour rather than of inclination. Throughout Paris he had obtained the soubriquet of the "English

Poco-curante;" and in truth the term was not ill applied; for his want of interest and excitement in the brilliant scenes by which he was surrounded, could only be accounted for by supposing, that he secretly entertained that distaste of the world, and every thing in it, which the noble Venetian so roundly expressed to Candide and the Manichean philosopher.

To the apartments of the person whose character we have been attempting to delineate did Count D'Ostalis hie, and luckily found their occupant at home.

" Pity me, my dear Cleveland," cried the Count, throwing himself into a fauteuil, with every mark of vexation and weariness, " Stoic as you are, extend your pity to the most unfortunate of men; I am plunged into the lowest gulf of despair."

" Excuse me, my dear Count," calmly replied

the Englishman, with a placid smile; "but I have seen you in that condition at least fifty times; and five minutes afterwards, I beheld you floating like a feather on the surface of an ocean of frivolity. With your leave, I will on the present occasion wait that period, and then pity you."

"Ah! how I envy your languid indifference; doubtless, it is the effect of the sea-coal fires, amid whose fumes you have passed your youth: but you have not heard my misadventures."

"Nay, I will anticipate them,—the fickle La Gabrielle has deserted you before she has quite completed your ruin."

"No," said the Count, very gravely, "that is not the present cause of my vexation; La Gabrielle has indeed basely deserted me, but that event took place a month ago."

"Consequently, you have emerged from the gulf of despair, into which doubtless you sunk

on that distressing occasion, just twenty-seven days, twenty-three hours, and fifty-five minutes ago."

"A truce to your mocking, and hear my griefs."

Cleveland bowed, and composed himself into an attitude of attention.

"You know the Marchioness de Montolieu?"

Cleveland gave a negative nod.

"Well, it is not necessary you should, to understand my story. She is the most lovely tigress in all France. My too susceptible heart, and so forth—you comprehend?"

"Perfectly," replied Cleveland.

"Good!—my inexorable goddess has imposed on me a task, to which the labours of Hercules were mere jokes—bagatelles, I assure you."

"Indeed!"

"She has enjoined me to discover some

novelty; to purvey something, at once new and amusing, for her entertainment." And the Count forthwith related, not without many digressions, all the efforts he had made, and all the adventures he had encountered, in the pursuit of this unattainable phantom novelty. "And now," said he to Cleveland, "what do you say to the idea?"

"Thus much," answered Cleveland, "that I have spent my whole life in the same pursuit which has occupied your last few hours,—and I find each succeeding day, and every thing that it brings with it, more weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable, than its predecessor. At last, grown wiser by disappointment, I have desisted; and now, I suffer myself to be borne along on the current of life, without making the smallest effort to alter my predestined course; well assured, that whatever persons cross my pathway—whe-

ther simple or sage—whatever events befal my passage, be they miscalled good or bad, all will alike leave my mind in the same dull state of indifference in which they found it."

The Count, who during the latter part of this speech had been gazing on the lid of his snuff-box, now took a pinch, and exclaimed—"Do not moralize, my dear friend, but tell me what course I had better take. She has forbidden me her presence until I have performed her behest."

"You might as well try to pluck a star from the firmament as essay success."

"I begin to think so myself: yet when I undertook the task, it seemed to me as easy as getting into debt. But advise; what would be your own conduct under such circumstances?"

"I should cut the knot by leaving her task unperformed, and evade the sentence of banish-

ment by disobeying her prohibition; but you would be very unwise to act in this manner."

"Why so?"

"Why should you not avail yourself of one of the happiest of natural gifts—the invaluable faculty of being excited by trifles. No, Count, you doubtless sup at the Duke de Fronsac's to-night?"

"Yes; but what of that?"

"You will there meet a large portion of the highest nobility of France. 'In a multitude of councillors there is safety,' said the royal sage. Without mentioning the Marchioness's name, propose your difficulty to the aristocratic conclave—the question is worthy of their solution."

"Thanks, my dear Cleveland," said the Count, squeezing his friend's hand with sincere gratitude, "a thousand thanks! I will certainly avail myself of your suggestion. Adieu for the

present, we shall meet this evening. Adieu, my dear friend, adieu!"

The Count, who in telling his story had attained his object in calling, now took his leave. He was not a natural born idiot; on the contrary, he came into the world with a fair average portion of ability. But, for many years, he had accustomed himself with unwearied assiduity to consider trifles in the light of serious events, and serious events in the light of trifles; until at last he had effectually confounded them, as Don Quixote did the castles and windmills.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DELICATE WAGER.

The Duke de Fronsac belonged to a class of characters unfortunately too numerous among the higher ranks of the French nation before the Revolution. Debarred by the despotic nature of their government from political occupations, and corrupted by the example of the court, many of the nobles gave themselves wholly up to libertinism. The duke seemed to consider himself born for no other purpose than to see how many women he could induce to transgress the

laws of society, and then abandon to shame and ruin. Seduction was not only the amusement, but the business of his life.

The Duke de Fronsac had now arrived at a period of existence, when age brings shame if not wisdom,—and the libertine becomes not only odious, but ridiculous. Yet time, while it wrinkled his cheek and benumbed his limbs, wrought no change in his habits and inclinations. Advancing years still found him engaged in his disgraceful pursuits. In vain had age stripped his person of all pretensions to please; art was summoned to repair the loss. The poor remains which fifty-six years of dissipation had left of a once handsome face and figure, were decorated with an anxiety, which would have made even a court beauty smile. The details of the toilette were multiplied and elaborated, until they almost assumed the dignity and im-

portance of a science: but when ingenuity had done her utmost, and the Duke felt, that despite the exertions of a whole army of artists, the hand of time was too deep to be effaced—that personal attractions had vanished for ever; he desisted not a jot from his usual objects, he only varied his means. The resources of an immense property were unhesitatingly lavished on his unworthy pursuits; and what he could no longer beguile from vanity or passion, he unblushingly purchased from distress and venality.

The Duke de Fronsac was in the habit of devoting the last Sunday evening in every month to a réunion of his male acquaintance. It was understood among all who had the honour of knowing the Duke, that they might on that evening, without any special invitation, repair to the Hôtel de Fronsac, where they would be sure to meet with an exquisite supper,

seasoned with a vast deal of colloquial intercourse, carried on in a style that was considerably more amusing than edifying. The tone of the conversation was not, perhaps, more essentially immoral than that which prevailed in the saloons, where the other sex were present, but it was much plainer. No doubt the power of dispensing with the modern periphrases, with which they were elsewhere forced to varnish keen and wicked sayings, constituted one of the principal attractions of the evening, in the eyes of the wits and rakes of Paris.

To a company convened under such auspices, did Count D'Ostalis propose the difficulties under which he laboured; and scorning that fastidious reserve which some men might have affected, he related without hesitation the peculiar circumstances by which he was first induced to commence the pursuit, and the penalty

to which he was exposed, in case of failure. He then threw out some intelligibly obscure insinuations, as to the reward he expected to receive, should his efforts be crowned with success. What little encouragement he had received to justify such language, the reader is well aware. In spite, however, of the reiterated attempts and solicitations of the party, the Count refused to divulge the name of his task-mistress; a piece of delicacy which was truly commendable, inasmuch as her own husband happened to be one of the audience. It is a physiological fact, known to the most ordinary observers, though unexplained by theologians and philosophers, that after men have imbibed a moderate portion of some alcoholic liquor, there is a prodigious inclination to banter upon any subject which bears the remotest allusion to the other sex. It may be conceived that the Count's tale, and

the serio-comic tone of despair in which it was narrated, was not calculated to lessen those propensities. An absolute tempest of witty sayings began to fall on the story-teller's head. Every species of extravagant and ironical remark was tendered amid unextinguishable shouts of laughter. Every one broke their joke on the new Hercules, and the metaphysical Omphale. The professed wits seemed to have an inexhaustible subject; and even the dullest, after some premeditation and preparation, discharged their single shafts at the general butt. The Count bore the pelting of the pitiless storm with great courage, or rather he enjoyed the hilarity and excitement of the moment (although he was its object), as much as any of the party. He defended himself too with much ingenuity, and returned some pungent answers to the numberless bon mots that were launched against him;

for, as we have before said, the Count was one of those who play the fool from choice, and not from necessity.

At last the shower began to abate. "Gentlemen," said the Chevalier de Crespigny, wiping his eyes, "if after so many brilliant sayings, it is permissible to utter what is simply useful, I would recommend our unfortunate novelty-hunter to apply to Count Cagliostro, who I understand has lately reappeared in Paris."

"What and who is this Count Cagliostro?" enquired Cleveland. "Every body talks about him, yet nobody will give me any clear, definite information respecting him."

"Morbleu," interrupted the Duke de Fronsac, "that complaint might be made to people's conversation on other subjects besides Cagliostro; but if you want him described, I refer you to Beaumarchais, who has had, if I mistake

not, one of his innumerable quarrels with Count Cagliostro. So, no doubt, he will discuss the topic with much truth and liveliness. Eh! Beaumarchais," continued he, arresting the attention of the celebrated author of 'Figaro,' "Cagliostro, who has not been heard of since the affair of the necklace,* has, according to the Chevalier de Crespigny's report, reappeared in Paris. Monsieur Cleveland wished to know who and what he is."

"It is a difficult task," said Beaumarchais, eagerly seizing the opportunity of calumniating an old opponent, "to describe a rogue with so many disguises. He is, Monsieur Cleveland, the prince of charlatans—the very Cæsar of jugglers. He is a wonderful alchymist, who has found out the art of transmuting folly into gold, and credulity into bank notes. For the trifling

* See note at the end of the third volume.

sum of a thousand louis-d'or, he sold an elixir of immortality to my friend the Marquis de Mirepoix, who died last year. He wheedled an old usurer into lending him two thousand livres. This sum his Countship received in hard cash, and by a magic process, converted it into double the amount in bills of exchange, which he gratefully presented to the old miser; but lo! when they became due, if they did not, like the money of the magician in the 'Arabian Nights,' actually turn into withered leaves, they proved of quite as little value. Add to these traits, that the Count has the remarkable faculty of being invisible whenever the police are in pursuit of him; and you will have some idea of the supernatural gifts of the far-famed Cagliostro."

"Bravo!" cried the Duke, "for a good sharp stinging libel, I would back Beaumarchais against any man in France."

"Ay," replied the Chevalier, "but though the gentlemen of the long robe say that truth is sometimes a libel; nobody will pretend that a libel is always truth. I will, therefore, take upon myself to aver, in spite of some traits which savour of charlatanism, and give a fair handle to Beaumarchais' satire, Cagliostro is, or rather was (for I know nothing of his late exploits) a most extraordinary personage. His scientific knowledge was great."

"Yes," said Beaumarchais, "if picking pockets be a science."

"But his acquaintance with events," persisted De Crespigny, "which he could not by any possible means have witnessed or heard related, was astonishing. I have heard some of the most sceptical of my friends confess their belief that he possessed to a certain extent the powers of divination."

"Assuredly then," retorted Beaumarchais, "if your friends were sceptics in anything, it was not from want of credulity. The power of divination to a certain extent! Shade of Voltaire! is it come to this, that one, who was once admitted to the honour of thy friendship and correspondence, can now avow his belief of a certain extent of divination? If, indeed, the necessity of believing nonsense be such a pressing want in the human breast, that as soon as one prejudice be expelled, another must be speedily absorbed, I would devoutly believe in the celestial pigeon, that brought to Clovis the sacred oil, wherewith our most Christian kings have ever since been anointed. If it were the law of my existence, Chevalier, that my reason must prostrate itself before a certain number of superstitions, I would at least select errors rendered respectable by antiquity, and consecrated

by custom;—not the flimsy impositions of a modern charlatan, who is still alive to mock you."

"Yet the man," answered the Chevalier, "who scoffs at superstition, will sometimes blindly swallow every prejudice that hatred can suggest. Alas! poor human nature! But you might have spared your eloquent apostrophe and tirade, since I never expressed my own belief in the supernatural powers of Cagliostro, but merely that of my friends."

"You mentioned the assertion without reprobating its absurdity," observed Beaumarchais.

"We are not *all* of us, my good Beaumarchais, unable to report a friend's opinion without a sarcasm," retorted De Crespigny. "But this much I will avow on my own behalf, that Cagliostro's means of obtaining secret information respecting parties who consulted him, was al-

most as wonderful as an actual power of divination would have been."

"Was not this same Cagliostro," asked Count D'Ostalis, "remarkable for his success with women of rank?"

"To such an extent," said De Crespigny, "that the opera girls thought it necessary to intrigue with him to keep up their reputation for fashion. Your ex-mistress La Gabrielle was, I believe, one of his most enthusiastic admirers."

"Humph!" said Count D'Ostalis, not looking particularly pleased. At this moment the Marquis de Montolieu whispered something to him. His face immediately brightened, and he exclaimed, "reserve your taunts for our noble host, for he was the last swain she deserted."

"What!" cried Beaumarchais; "La Gabrielle must be getting insane! Has she voluntarily left the wealthiest man in France, and, I might

add, the most generous," continued he in a low tone, "where merit and distress are not applicants."

"Yes," said the Duke, vainly endeavouring to disguise the air of vexation which he felt overspreading his face; "the awful catastrophe to which you allude has taken place. Luckily, the fact has happened twenty times before; therefore I bear it with equanimity, and believe it the most fortunate calamity that ever happened to me. Condole with me, if you like; but it is a misfortune that can give no pleasure even to my best friends."

The Marquis de Montolieu smiled, and took snuff with a triumphant air.

"Well, Marquis," continued the Duke, "you seem in a hurry to boast of your new acquisition. I only wish that you may not repent your success with equal celerity. I, who have

escaped from the fair demon, can pity those who are about to be subjected to her spell."

"You, who have escaped from the fair demon!" repeated the Marquis. "You mean, my dear Duke, that she has escaped from you. But never mind! Many thanks for your hopes, and your pity, which are both, no doubt, equally sincere; though I do not need either, to enable me to bear the misfortune of having the finest woman in France under my protection."

"I can safely aver," replied the Duke, "that the most satisfactory moment of my acquaintance with La Gabrielle, was that in which I bade her adieu."

"The fox in the fable said something to the same purpose," cried Montolieu, "but the world has never believed him."

"Hear me, Messieurs!" exclaimed the Duke, rising with much excitement from his seat.

"I will propose a toast. To the most perfect beauty in France, who, secluded from the world, in the loveliest spot which the province of Champagne contains, exists only for love, and the fortunate Duke de Fronsac!"

A shout of laughter followed this announcement.

"I can easily conceive," said the Chevalier de Crespigny, "that the Duke has found a new beauty in Champagne."

"Yes," observed one, "that sparkling wine suggests such visions."

"Drink six more glasses, my dear Duke," cried another, "and you will see two."

"Joke as much as you please, gentlemen," replied the Duke; "I have said nothing but the sober truth."

Another shout of laughter.

"Can I," said the Marquis de Montolieu,

appealing to the party, most of whom had, by this time drank enough to enjoy the indelicate dispute: "Can I, either as a philosopher or as a knight, yield the supremacy of my dulcinea's beauty, without some better proof than a loose assertion, hastily uttered over the wine-table?"

"No—no—certainly not," was repeated from all sides.

"I will bet you a thousand louis," cried the Duke, passionately, "that my unknown beauty is a thousand times more lovely than La Gabrielle."

"Done!" exclaimed the Marquis.

The party were in extasy at the bet; and some of the most inebriated hinted, that both ladies ought to be immediately produced to the assembled company, who should, after ocular inspection, decide on the question of superiority.

"No!" said the Marquis de Montolieu, who was the proudest aristocrat in France. "Decision by the vote of the majority savours of republicanism; and France always has been, and always will be, a monarchy. I will refer the matter to the arbitration of a single umpire. Nay, I will be magnanimous enough to select a discarded lover for the judge. I propose the Count d'Ostalis."

"I shall be most happy," cried the Count, with enthusiasm, "to accept the delicate office."

"Much obliged to you," answered the Duke; "but I distrust the Count's known predilections; besides I frankly confess, I deem him too susceptible a gentleman to enact the part of Paris. My Helen would not be safe; for, after having been umpire, he might perchance aspire to be something more. I propose, as arbitra-

tor, the English poco-curante, Monsieur Cleveland."

Half a dozen voices eagerly ratified the propriety of the choice.

"Yes," said two or three; "Cleveland for ever, as a safe judge! Fastidious and indifferent: all taste, and no passion! Yes! yes! it is a settled thing."

"Pardon me, gentlemen," observed Cleveland; "the thing is not quite settled. The consent of one humble individual, insignificant indeed in himself, but apparently not altogether unimportant in the present arrangement, has not yet been asked; and, I am sorry to add, can never be given. Gentlemen, I will freely confess, that I entertain a great distaste to the nature of the bet which has just been made; and I am sure that, by to-morrow morning, you will all sympathize with my repugnance. Under

these circumstances, you will not be surprised that I should peremptorily decline the office which has just been conferred upon me."

Cleveland's refusal, however, availed him but little. The majority of the company had now become violently excited on the subject. Its decision appeared to their wine-affected imaginations, the most desirable, the most important, and the most necessary event in the universe.

Unabashed by the dry and peremptory manner in which Cleveland had couched his refusal, the party surrounded him,—flattered,—coaxed, —besought,—wearied him with prayers and entreaties.

He found himself placed in a position, of all others the most disagreeable to a naturally polite and good-natured man: that is, opposing his own taste and inclination to the wishes of a whole company. His obstinacy was not equal

to their pertinacity. He yielded, (as thousands have done before in similar circumstances) against his own better sense, to the desires of the majority. The volition of one man can never withstand the accumulated will of an unanimous multitude.

"Have you ever seen La Gabrielle?" inquired Montolieu, with eager triumph, of the over-persuaded Cleveland.

"Yes, frequently."

"Where? How?" demanded Montolieu.

"I paid for the sight—but not quite so dearly as our friends, the Count D'Ostalis and the Duke de Fronsac, have done. I saw her on the stage, from the front seat of the orchestra; and I must own, indifferent as you think me, I have been frequently tempted to renew the spectacle."

"Ha! you admire her, then?"

"I think her the most perfect model of physical beauty I have ever seen, alive or dead,—in stone, on canvas, or in flesh."

"You hear him, Duke," exclaimed Montolieu; "you hear your own umpire. In the excess of my magnanimity, I will let you off the bet for nine hundred louis."

"You had better reserve your magnanimity for your coming defeat," replied the Duke. "I hear indeed what my umpire says; and I, in his position, (that is to say, not having seen the beauty whom I pitt against La Gabrielle) would be content to echo his opinion."

"And when shall the bet be decided?" asked two or three of the party.

"Between this evening," answered the Duke, "and the next monthly revel, I will give the umpire the power of forming a comparative estimate of the two beauties. Monsieur Cleve-

land then, by this day month, will be prepared to make his award."

Cleveland reluctantly gave his assent, and the party broke up.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAGLIOSTRO.

THE Count, unlike the rest of the company, had not taken much interest in the progress of the bet, nor did he anticipate with much excitement its ultimate decision. His thoughts were occupied with the suggestions the Chevalier de Crespigny had let fall. He had taken a private opportunity to request the Chevalier to inform him of Cagliostro's address, and that gentleman had been good enough to consent. At the period of Cagliostro's former appearance in

Paris, he remembered the Marchioness to have expressed much curiosity respecting that singular personage, and to have regretted that she had not taken an opportunity of witnessing his feats of skill. Early on the morning which followed the Duke de Fronsac's revel, he commenced his enterprize.

Cagliostro lodged in the Rue St. Honoré: it was the first floor over a gunsmith's shop. Count D'Ostalis mounted the staircase with a feeling of disappointment at the common-place appearance of the premises. He knocked at the door; it was opened by a lacquey, in a genteel, but ordinary livery. He requested to know whether the Count Cagliostro was at home. The lacquey asked for his card, and saying he would see, left Count D'Orsalis, to his infinite indignation, standing alone on the staircase. He soon returned with the gracious announcement,

that his master would be happy to see Count D'Ostalis. The latter followed his conductor, and was ushered into a comfortable, though plainly furnished room. He looked round with great disappointment. The apartment was not hung with Egyptian or even oriental tapestry, as he had expected. There were no stuffed crocodiles, or lizards, or flying fishes; no black circles ornamented with the signs of the Zodiac, nor even a parchment scroll inscribed with magic characters. There were none, in short, of the ordinary paraphernalia of a modern conjuror. A few portable bookcases looked as if they had been introduced by the present occupant. Two tables also, in the corner of the room, were covered with chemical apparatus, electrical machines, and other philosophical instruments.

A door opened opposite to that by which Count D'Ostalis had entered, and a tall remark-

ably handsome man, of about forty years of age, made his appearance. His figure was athletic, and unimpaired by the obesity of middle age. His strong jet-black curling locks of hair, mingling with plentiful whiskers of the same colour, gave an air of almost supernatural lustre to his wild, dark, restless eyes. His brow was broad, prominent, and open,—though not high or elevated: his other features were symmetrical, and constantly changing their expression, though most commonly softened with a smile. His dress consisted of the apparel then fashionable among the higher ranks, and was remarkably rich and magnificent.

"After all," thought Count D'Ostalis, "though he looks more like one of ourselves than a magician, the Marchioness would only have laughed at a conjuror with a false beard and a silver wand."

The Count D'Ostalis spoke first. "Have I the honour," said he, "to be in the presence of the celebrated Count Cagliostro?"

Cagliostro bowed assent, and motioned his visitor to be seated, at the same time setting him the example.

"Monsieur," exclaimed D'Ostalis, "I have a request to prefer, which, considering the formality of my present visit, may appear strange and ridiculous."

He had been so thoroughly quizzed at the Duke's, that he began to be half ashamed of his mission.

"Make your request, Count D'Ostalis," answered Cagliostro, in a lofty and yet melodious voice; "there is nothing strange or ridiculous to me. I have burrowed to the hearts of the eternal pyramids, and there found dried ashes nd preserved snakes; I have penetrated to the

centre of the most brilliant courts in Europe, and reptiles were there also. In the loveliest Oasis of sandy Arabia, I found a golden, glorious fruit, the same as that which tempted our first parents: I cut the glowing, blushing rind, and found a grub at the core. I have dissected the Grand Master of the Maltese Knights, and found worms there too. Make your request then, Monsieur,—make it without hesitation: there is nothing strange or ridiculous to me."

"Good," thought the Count, "this will do—this charlatanry is of the mind—this will please the Marchioness." He resumed aloud: "I am connected with a beautiful lady, not by the ties of the Church, but by certain silken links, which Monsieur Cagliostro, as a man of the world, knows are a deuced deal stronger than the matrimonial fetters. Well! she is the most ennuyée woman in all Paris; which is strange

enough, considering whom she has for a lover, and she has enjoined me, under sentence of eternal banishment from her sweet presence, to purvey her some novelty. I frankly confess my exertions in pursuit of that object have entirely failed. Despairing of all other means, I seek the aid of Monsieur le Comte Cagliostro."

"You have done well," returned Cagliostro.

"Is there such a thing as novelty in the world?" asked Count D'Ostalis.

"There is, and there is not," answered Cagliostro. "If you ask me, is there novelty as an absolute entity? I reply, no;—but if you say, is there novelty as a relative existence—I answer, yes! All matter is eternal, and incapable of annihilation. Every atom which is to-day, must have been yesterday, and will necessarily be to all eternity. Nay more, every imaginable combination of matter, every conceivable arrange-

ment of thought, must have had its prototype and predecessor in the infinite series of by-gone ages. The very ideas now passing through your mind; the very words I am now using, have perhaps agitated the brain, and moved the tongue, of some former beings, in a remote star, a thousand billions of years before the first and oldest of the pre-adamite worlds emerged from chaos. Absolute novelty then is an impossibility—a contradiction in terms—a solecism—a chimera—a word without a corresponding existence in the universe of things—"

"Spare me, my dear Sir," cried Count D'Ostalis, rubbing his forehead in an agonized manner; "you have taken away my breath, I will be content with relative novelty—the absolute makes my head ache. Half of what I have heard would infallibly drive the Marchioness mad."

"Relative novelty is the sentiment of surprise with which one contemplates objects for the first time. Nothing is new to me, who have felt all, seen all, and considered all: but many things are doubtless new to a Parisian lady, who has most probably felt very little, and not thought at all."

"Parbleu!" cried the Count, "such language will be a novelty with a vengeance to a beauty sated with the choicest flattery in Paris."

"Do not alarm yourself, Monsieur," replied Cagliostro, "I should as soon think of feeding a linnet on beefsteaks and port wine, as offering truth to a woman. But you have not yet communicated her name and degree."

"The Marchioness de Montolieu—an Italian by birth."

"Good!—I am well acquainted with the lady."

"Humph!" said the Count, rather dryly. "Pray, Monsieur, will you give me a cursory idea of the mode in which you intend to astonish the Marchioness, for that, I believe, was your definition of relative novelty. To what point, may I ask, have your studies been lately directed?"

"Studies!" exclaimed Cagliostro. "But I pardon the insult. This is the first time you have seen Cagliostro. Henceforth, Count D'Ostalis, know that the imbecile laborious disciples of the inductive philosophy, who consume their life in poring over isolated facts, and then timidly venture, towards the termination of their career, to publish a few partial uncertain inferences, may indeed be said to study!—I scorn the word, as much as I scorn the system of which it is the basis. I, long ago, even in the period of my burning youth, discovered these awful and mysterious prin-

ciples of abstract truth, upon which all wisdom must be founded—from which all knowledge must be derived. And having once mounted to this sphere of pure and perfect intellectual light—having once touched this dazzling and sublime point, where the thousand different paths of thought meet and converge—where the many-coloured, and apparently dissimilar, rays of poetry, mathematics, logic, and physics, blend into one simple and effulgent whole,—I can with ease descend by the *à priori* mode of reasoning, upon any particular point of knowledge I may wish to attain."

"Parbleu !" cried the Count; "that would be an excellent school for us nobles, who wish to know every thing without learning any thing. The Marchioness will very likely attend a course of lectures. By the by, in what character shall I represent you to her ?"

"As a true philosopher."

"Bah!" cried the Count D'Ostalis. "Nothing can be more insipid, more hackneyed, more worn out, than the term philosopher. Not a journalist in Paris, who scribbles for his daily bread, but terms himself a philosopher. Yet, setting aside pretenders, we are overrun even with real geniuses:—I am sick of your D'Alemberts, Leibnitzs, and Newtons."

"Ay," returned Cagliostro; "but I differ from the vulgar herd of geniuses in this respect. Their object in seeking truth was to enlighten their follow-creatures. The absurdity of their end soon extended itself to the means they used. Their success was limited and circumscribed. Their souls were clogged in their flight towards the empyrean of truth, by the weight of the brutal and earthly minds they endeavoured to carry with them. Now, my object in seeking truth (or rather in contem-

plating it, for search is unnecessary with me), is to elevate and glorify my inner-self, while I, in my esoteric practice, endeavour to mystify and degrade mankind."

"Humph!" answered the Count D'Ostalis. "A suspicion of the real fact has once or twice crossed my mind during the conversation I have had the honour of holding with you: but I care not. Mystify the Marchioness—that is, astonish her with something new, and I am content."

"Let the Marchioness," said Cagliostro, "repair, at any time to-morrow, either alone or attended, to this my humble domicile, and your will—mark me, I say your will—not the Marchioness's—shall be accomplished. Will that suffice you?"

"It will," answered D'Ostalis, briskly. "Violently as I am in love, I am rational enough to prefer my own gratification to that of my adored."

"But I am not so satisfied," said Cagliostro. "There is one little preliminary condition, which must be immediately performed by you."

"What is that?"

"The payment of fifty louis."

"Humph! It will be time enough," observed Count D'Ostalis, very gravely, "to ask for the gratuity when the service is performed."

"Not at all so—I shall then demand a repetition of the compliment."

"Monsieur Cagliostro," returned the Count, sarcastically, "seems not to confine his partiality for the *à priori* system to matters of abstract speculation. He wishes to apply it to money affairs, where he no doubt expects to find it productive of the same rapid profit that it brought in philosophy. Now, in this case, I own I prefer the Baconian mode of operation—that is, first perform your experiment, then draw the results,—or, in other words, the hard cash."

"These are vain words, Monsieur le Comte. My demands must be implicitly complied with."

The Count hesitated.

"You distrust me?"

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"Hear me—your distrust shows a certain knowledge of human nature; but it betrays an ignorance of those great principles of action that are the hinges, if I may so express myself, upon which the world must turn. You think me a scoundrel—I think you a man of fashion —so our moral estimate of each other is pretty much the same. But were we the worst of felons, we must still trust one another, if we would act in concert."

"There is some truth in your reasoning," replied Count D'Ostalis, somewhat ruefully; "but I always notice, in these matters, that the man who receives the money, moralizes much more calmly than the one who pays."

"The remark is indicative of an observant mind," said Cagliostro, with an air of candour; at the same time extending his dexter hand in the true professional style—the elbow closely nestled in the side—the palm gently hollowed into an elegant little cavity, for the reception of the money—the fingers vibrating with amorous eagerness to clutch the much-loved metal.

Count D'Ostalis slowly paid the amount. The digits of the great master of *à priori* reasoning hermetically closed over the sum; while a gracious and intelligent smile mantled over his countenance. The Attorney-General himself could not have received his "quiddam honorarium" with a better grace.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHARLATAN PUT TO THE TEST.

Count D'Ostalis met his capricious task-mistress on the appointed evening with an exulting heart. The sentiment of triumph is the most exquisite of all terrestrial feelings—no matter how wide or how narrow the sphere of action—no matter how rich or how vile the prize—the boards of a theatre or the floor of the senate—a game at cards or a speculation for millions—a harlot or an angel—a scuffle in the street or an empire-deciding battle—success

is still success—the nectar of life; and a few drops of this immortal liquor, poured into our cup, enables us to endure its bitterness,—wins us, in spite of reason, to live on, and consoles us for the long, long years, of wasted labour and ulcerating disappointment.

Yes, it was with a sensation of triumph that Count D'Ostalis sought the Marchioness; for he too had succeeded in his own immeasurably small way: when great was his astonishment and indignation to find that she had forgotten, or affected to have forgotten, the whole affair. So full, however, was his mind of the singular character with whom he had lately come in contact, that in spite of his anger he could not forbear chattering about Cagliostro.

"He is the most overpowering talker I ever met with. Your friend, or rather enemy, Diderot, is nothing to him. Start any topic you

please, then change the conversation to the antipodes of the former subject; on each or both, he will burst upon you like a snow storm—wrap you in a whirlwind of ingenious nonsense—lift you far above the regions of comprehensibility—then dash you down to earth with some bitter sarcasm. If his deeds are only in the fiftieth degree commensurate with his words, you will be most furiously amused, my dear Marchioness."

Madame de Montolieu listened to the Count with surprise. She had never heard him speak with such vigour and energy before. The Count, who was imitative as a monkey, had in fact imbibed some portion of Cagliostro's style. The Marchioness's curiosity was roused, not so much by what he actually said, as by what he appeared to feel. She knew that light and frivolous minds are not easily susceptible of any

deep impression; and she felt curious to see the being who had so strongly excited the Count's enthusiasm. She began to hesitate, and we all know in what manner the woman who once hesitates between a sense of propriety and her own inclination, always ultimately decides.

"Well, Count," said the Marchioness, "but supposing I were even inclined to attend to the mysterious and philosophic appointment you have thought fit to make for me, (which I most certainly shall not) how am I to effect my purpose? I cannot go there without a female companion, and to take one, is to betray my folly to all Paris."

"True, Madame; and even supposing that you could find such a phœnix—such an eighth wonder of the world—such an impossible paragon as a woman who could keep the secret of a female friend, it might not be. You must go

there alone, or attended only by me,—so wills the inflexible Cagliostro." This, as the reader will recollect, was not strictly true; but the Count saw she was yielding, and determined to press his advantage.

"Alone, or with you," said the Marchioness musingly. "The company of a savage is preferable to utter solitude—at least so said Robinson Crusoe, who must have understood the matter after twenty-eight years study. Yes, Count, you shall accompany me."

"Highly flattered."

"You will at least protect me from every one but yourself."

"Ah! Madame," responded the Count, bowing, sighing, and smirking all at once.

"Stop, Count; this will not do. Curiosity is my *only* weakness—at present. I am going to meet this strange juggler you speak off—not

you. Do you understand me, Count? May I trust you?"

"By all that's sacred!"

"What *is* sacred to a Frenchman of the eighteenth century?" replied the Marchioness thoughtfully. "Do not your nation hold that in love and war every stratagem is allowable."

"No, Madame," retorted the Count; "that is an Italian proverb."

"Well, if the maxim be of Italian origin, it is of European application."

"I swear upon the honour of a Frenchman," cried D'Ostalis with great energy, "that you may trust me."

The Marchioness burst into a laugh "Ha! ha! ha! I believe that is the most awful adjuration which the vain Gallic race are capable of conceiving. Well, I will trust you, Count—not because you swear, but because, though

a terrible coxcomb, I believe you to be a gentleman."

The Count's eyes glistened with pleasure. The Marchioness looked as if she more than half repented of her promise. "Alas! alas!" said she with slow accents, as if rather soliloquizing than speaking, "I think I must be a lineal descendant of Eve. What a terrible passion is this curiosity—more dangerous even than vanity. How paltry, how contemptible its bait! Yet to a mind sunk in languor and ennui, how irresistible! How I wish I had children to amuse me! Unseduced by the allurements of guilt, I am consenting to wear its appearance—for what?—an hour's pastime—for the spectacle of some new folly, which will not last five minutes; and yet with which I shall most probably be tired before it is finished."

The next evening the Marchioness went

early to the Opera. It had been arranged between her and the Count that she should pretend indisposition; that Count d'Ostalis should feign to escort her to her carriage; and that instead of summoning her equipage, he should call a fiacre, and proceed without delay to Cagliostro.

According to the time she was detained there, the Marchioness would have the option of either returning to the opera, on the plea that her headache had left her, or going home and directing her maître-d'hôtel to scold her coachman for neglecting to attend the imaginary summons. The plan succeeded admirably. The fiacre was procured, the Marchioness, muffled up in a new cloak which she had never worn before, and which it may be conceived she resolved never to wear again, stepped into it with the Count, and soon arrived at Cagliostro's lodgings. The door was opened, and they were

received, not by the lacquey whom Count D'Ostalis had seen on his first visit, but by a young and handsome page, somewhat fantastically attired.

They were ushered into the same room in which Cagliostro had received the Count. The furniture was not changed. The portable bookcases were still standing on one side of the room, while the philosophical instruments occupied the other. A single lamp, suspended from the ceiling, gave a moderate but sufficient light to the apartment.

"There is nothing very alarming in the appearance of the conjurer's premises," cried the Marchioness, seating herself on a sofa.

"Did you observe," said the Count, placing himself by her side, "the page who received us? Did it not strike you that he, or rather she, did not wear the garb of her sex?"

The Marchioness did not answer the question, but she rose up—took a volume from the book-case—placed it on a chair—then said: "Go to that chair, Count, and quietly read that book, without speaking, until your famous magician deigns to make his appearance. Remember the honour of a Frenchman."

The Count sighed, but obeyed the order. It may be imagined that he did not peruse the volume with much interest: he, however, had the patience to retain his position for about ten minutes. At the end of this time, he stole a glance at the Marchioness. Her eyes were fixed on her book, but she was smiling.

"Pardon me, Madame," said he; "but I shall die of weariness, if I sit here another five minutes. Will you allow me to examine the instruments on that table?"

"I think I may permit you that indulgence."

The Count rose,—refreshed himself with a tremendous yawn,—and then, approaching the table, began to handle and examine the various instruments with which it was strewed. He incautiously laid his hands on an electrical jar, which, either by accident or design, had been left charged, and received a smart shock. He immediately executed a most vigorous caper, that was not at all in keeping with his usual languid movements.

"That rascal Cagliostro! I see how it is. He has bolted with my fifty louis, and left these accursed instruments here to assassinate me!"

The Marchioness had a good deal of scientific knowledge, which she concealed with as much care as the Count did his good sense. "Bah!" cried she, laughing; "it is only an electrical jar. Why do you touch and finger every thing, like a child? But in good truth,

Count, I am tired of stopping any longer; I have waited for your moral enchanter a quarter of an hour, which is fifteen times as long as I would have waited for a king. So I insist upon it, that you run down stairs, and either find Cagliostro, or our fiacre. I am exceedingly obliged to you for the brilliant entertainment you have afforded me. It is an admirable reward for the risk and peril I have encountered to get here."

The Count bit his lips, and approached the door, for bells there were none. He twisted the handle, he shook it—still it did not open.

"By heavens!" exclaimed he, "it is locked."

The Marchioness did not scream, but she became extremely white.

"Count D'Ostalis, unless you would have me consider you the most worthless and perjured of human beings—open that door."

"On the honour of a Frenchman!" began the Count——

"Stop, Sir, you have given that pledge once too often. Will you deny that you are a party to this infamous trick?"

"I will swear that I had no hand in its contrivance. That I am a party, together with yourself, to the trick," added he, ruefully, "as a fellow victim, is as little my choice as it is your's."

"Then instantly break open the door," said the indignant and frightened Marchioness.

"Parbleu! Madam; birth may make a man a count, but it does not make a man a locksmith. Besides, I have no tools," said he, stretching forth a pair of extremely white and useless-looking hands.

"Take anything," replied the agitated lady. "For God's sake make the attempt, or I am

lost." She snatched up a brass rod, that was lying among the philosophic instruments, and thrust it into his hand. There—there—that will do—only try."

Rather to pacify the Marchioness, than from any hope of succeeding, the Count began pecking and tapping at the lock, in a most helpless and ludicrously inefficient manner.

The Marchioness clasped her hands in despair. Suddenly her eye fell upon the other door of the apartment. "Perhaps that is not locked," said she, darting forward. She opened it—advanced a step—uttered one piercing shriek—and, staggering back into the apartment, fell senseless on the floor.

The Count, who had turned round at her cry, rushed forward. The door opened into a long dark passage, at the end of which the Count saw, illuminated by some strong light, a young man of surpassing beauty, habited in an

almost savage apparel of goat-skins. He had scarcely time to snatch a single glance at this appearance, when the door closed to, with tremendous violence; at the same moment, the door which was locked flew open, and Cagliostro entered, with a smiling countenance.

"Good evening, Count D'Ostalis," said he, in a brisk tone of voice; "the fifty louis, if you please."

"Monster!" exclaimed the other, who was kneeling beside the insensible Marchioness. "Dare you ask a reward for murder?"

"A sense of duty to my own interests," quietly replied Cagliostro, "will prevent me from rendering you assistance, until the fifty louis are paid."

"There, ruffian," cried the Count, tearing from his pocket a heavy purse, and throwing it at him: "now, help your victim."

Cagliostro walked with great composure to the table, and, taking up a jug of water and a goblet, approached the Marchioness, and dashed two or three goblets-full over her pale face. He then forced a portion of the pure element down her throat.

The Marchioness at length uttered a deep sigh, and opened her eyes.

"There !" said Cagliostro. "It is nothing; or, at least, is now over. Farewell, Count; Madame de Montolieu will never ask you for novelty again. Adieu, Sir; your fiacre is waiting at the door."

By this time, Madame de Montolieu was much recovered. The Count began to pour forth a profusion of apologies. Could he have had the slightest suspicion of what would have been the result of this fatal spectacle, he would have died ten thousand deaths, rather than have exposed her to the shock.

He solemnly assured the Marchioness, that he had not the smallest participation in the scene which had just happened.

"Make no apologies," said the Marchioness, faintly; "It was my own fault. A sudden spasm shot—that is—I mean, a sudden fright shot across me. Take me away—not back to the opera. No—no.—I must go home—I am ill."

As there was nothing very frightful in the figure which Count D'Ostalis had witnessed, he was disposed to attribute the swoon and subsequent agitation of Madame de Montolieu, rather to some association connected with the appearance, than to the mere spectacle itself. His curiosity was much excited; but when he saw the exhausted state of the Marchioness, and her evident disinclination to afford any explanation, he had sufficient delicacy to forbear

putting any questions on the subject: there was therefore little conversation between them as the fiacre proceeded to the Hôtel de Montolieu. He there explained to the domestics that their mistress had been suddenly taken ill at the opera, a story which her appearance corroborated; and that her equipage not having arrived, he had been compelled to bring her home in a fiacre.

CHAPTER X.

THE INTERVIEW.

It was evening; Cagliostro sat alone in his chamber, musing on the events of the preceding evening. A lady was announced.

"Her name?"

"She declined giving it, Monsieur le Comte," answered the lacquey, "but says she is well known to you."

"Show her in."

A female, so muffled and veiled, that neither

face nor figure could be recognized, entered the apartment with unsteady and irresolute steps.

Cagliostro rose, and assisted her to a chair. The stranger accepted the courtesy, and after two or three preparatory efforts to speak, at last said, in an agitated and tremulous voice,

"Is Monsieur le Comte de Cagliostro disposed to assist an unfortunate lady, who throws herself on his generosity?"

"Never yet was such an appeal made to him in vain!"

"For any trouble which I may give," said she producing a weighty purse, "I shall be most happy to compensate."

"Make your request first, Marchioness de Montolieu; it will then be time for him to form his demand."

"It is in vain to deceive you, Count Cagliostro," said the lady, removing her veil.

"The tones of that voice," gravely observed Cagliostro, without any approach to gallantry in his manner—"once heard, would never be forgotten."

"Count Cagliostro," resumed the Marchioness, still speaking with effort, "it is not with the idle intention of deriving amusement from your talents that I have to-day ventured hither at a risk.—Oh, God! my heart grows sick at the thoughts of discovery: but I am haunted by a horrid anxiety—a restless, feverish, burning, uncertainty, to which even my present fears are preferable. I cannot eat—sleep—think—live—unless I am satisfied. Is he—I mean is the person whose effigy you last night exhibited to me still alive?"

"He is."

"In what country?" faintly asked the Marchioness.

"In France—at Paris."

"Oh God! and his name?"

"Is at present Count Cagliostro."

The Marchioness uttered a subdued cry, and covered her face with both her hands, while the tears forced their way between her slender fingers.

"Peruse these features;" said Cagliostro, gravely and even mournfully: "can you not yet discover in the charlatan some of the lineaments which charmed you in the saint?"

The Marchioness's anguish seemed to increase.

"Be comforted, lady," said Cagliostro, "you are not the first by millions, who has mistaken an impostor for a messenger of the Deity."

"May we not with justice," said the weeping Marchioness, "complain of Providence, when we are permitted by one single act to render our whole lives miserable?"

"I leave those questions to theologians, seeing that the justice or injustice of our complaints does not affect the misery of the result. But know, if it is any consolation to you, that of all my misdeeds I repent me of this one alone: believe me there was no premeditation, no deliberate intention to injure. I was apprenticed in my youth to an engraver at Florence; a neighbouring painter, whose powers of execution were greater than his conception, selected me as a model for that fatal picture, which was placed in the cathedral of a neighbouring town. In the frolicsome rashness of youth, I threatened to exhibit myself under the picture on some high festival. My master, and his friend, the painter, were frightened, and took the trouble to repurchase the picture and to send it to Rome, where it went for half its value. They indemnified themselves for their loss and trouble with the

saint, by inflicting a tremendous thrashing on the original, which compliment I have since repaid a thousand fold. Indignant at this treatment, I fled to an old uncle, who was gardener at the convent of St. John; there, by an extraordinary coincidence, I again found the picture. My mad and mischievous spirit urged me to play a part which I now deeply regret. The rest you know. You see we are all the beings of circumstance: the hero is its creature—the criminal its victim."

"If you regret, as you profess to do," said the Marchioness mournfully, "the suffering you have occasioned, you will not increase that misery, by revealing events now known, I trust, only to yourself."

"Lady, your secret is safe in my hands—safer than it would be in the keeping of many a titled scion of nobility."

There was something in the tone of Cagliostro's voice that wounded the Marchioness's feelings; for she burst into a fresh torrent of tears, and exclaimed, with an irresistible burst of natural feeling, "Oh, God! that I should live to see my honour in such keeping!"

"Madame de Montolieu, you do me injustice, —you know not what you owe to my forbearance. I love you—nay, start not, nor cover your face with your hands—yes, I love you—have loved you for years: who has so good a right? Yet, tell me, have you ever been insulted by the admiration of Cagliostro? Have you ever been tormented by marks of his attachment? Has he ever intruded himself into your presence? You—not I—sought this interview. I was content to behold you, as the moth watches the star. Yes, amid the splendour of the opera, surrounded, as you were, by

the minions of fashion, there was an eye that still gazed at you from beneath, with quiet, yet intense adoration. Many a night as you stepped unconscious from your gay equipage, there was a heart amid the crowd, though you were never troubled with the knowledge, that would have given worlds for the short pleasure of assisting you to alight: yet the man who felt these passionate emotions, kept them suppressed for years in his heart's core, because their slightest manifestation would have been injurious to your happiness. He does not ask you to return his feelings, but give him at least some credit for delicacy and generosity."

There was a long pause, during which they both gazed on each other with an expression of countenance that would have been difficult to define. A. crowd of jarring and indistinct emotions seemed struggling there for predominance. The Marchioness first broke silence.

"Pardon me, if I have offended you. Though late, I indeed do justice to your generous self-denial; you said well, that we were indeed the beings of circumstance: would we had met under happier auspices.—Monsieur de Cagliostro, in a career like yours, money must be always valuable, and is likely to be sometimes wanting. Oblige me by accepting this trifle." She produced the purse before alluded to. "It is needless to say I do not offer it as a bribe. I am well aware that had you been so inclined, you might long since have extorted from me my last livre. I offer it to you frankly and freely, as a proof of my regard."

"Never!" said Cagliostro, turning away from the proffered gift. "Money, I will confess, is not an object of indifference to me; and save that I scorn to wring it from the poor and oppressed, I am not very scrupulous how I obtain it. Yes, before now, I have, perhaps,

invaded property—property forsooth!—what is property but a right created by craft and power to appropriate to themselves the fruits of others' labour. But not from you, Erminia de Montolieu, will I receive a single denier."

The Marchioness was touched in spite of herself. "Accept, then," said she, "a ring, which can have no value but what it derives from the intention of the donor."

Cagliostro took the ring, and respectfully pressed it to his lips.

"Farewell, then, Monsieur de Cagliostro, for ever. It is better for both that we should not meet again."

The Marchioness rose to depart, but she stopped short near the door, and seemed overpowered with agitation.

"Monsieur," said she, her voice almost choaked with emotion, "I have not yet sum-

moned courage enough to put the question that lies nearest my heart, but I could not depart without. The question is one of shame and agony, but though the effort cost me my life, I will utter it. You seem, unknown to myself, to have watched my course through life,—can you reveal to me the fate of the unfortunate being to whom my guilt gave birth?"

"Alas! Madame, I have spent years,—years, which the world deemed were far otherwise employed, in vain attempts to unravel the mystery. The pursuit of this knowledge has been the object and the torment of my existence."

The agitation in the Marchioness's countenance gave way to a look of blank disappointment. "So dies," said she, despairingly, "the last hope that lurked at the bottom of my heart. The vain, wild hope, that prompted me to seek this interview."

"Do not despair, lady," said Cagliostro; "believe me, I will never cease my exertions until I have either ascertained her present fate and condition, or till I am satisfied that she has ceased to exist. Success, though late, must come at last to the undaunted and persevering. When that happens, may I hope for the honour of another interview?"

"Oh! yes, yes," replied Madame de Montolieu hurriedly; "ask anything *then*—yes—I will see you then;—I care not for fame, I care not for danger, could I but once see her, hear the tone of her voice, though but for a single moment, I could afterwards die in peace. But time presses—I must be gone."

"Farewell, then, until I shall be able to afford you that pleasure."

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD RAKE AND THE YOUNG MISANTHROPE.

IT was not long before Cleveland received a polite message from the Duke de Fronsac, requesting to know whether he had leisure enough to undertake a short journey into the country. Cleveland understood the intimation; and though still averse to perform the part which had been so vexatiously thrust upon him, he felt that he could not now, without betraying a ridiculous infirmity of purpose, recede from his engagement. Under this conviction, he

repaired to the Hôtel de Fronsac. The Duke received him with much affability, and apologized with much earnestness for the plebeian nature of the conveyance to which they should be compelled to resort.

Circumstances prevented him from using his ordinary travelling equipage on the present occasion. To perform the journey on horseback was tedious and fatiguing in the extreme, so that there remained no resource but the public diligence. He had, however, endeavoured to secure Monsieur Cleveland as much as possible from contact with the canaille, by engaging the coupé, or fore-part of the vehicle, for their exclusive use.

Cleveland expressed his perfect content at the arrangements which had been made; but intimated his surprise that the Duke, who thought more of such things, should condescend to dispense with his usual travelling comforts.

"The truth is, my dear Sir, that I drop my dukedom in Champagne, and content myself with the more moderate title of Baron de Voisenon. You must be aware how soon my real name would be divulged, if I travelled with half-a-dozen idle chattering domestics."

They journeyed in silence for a few miles; at last the Duke began to talk.

"The world would call me very imprudent, Monsieur Cleveland, if they knew where I was conducting you. They would say, that the shepherd, who shows the wolf to the fold, may thank himself if his sheep are stolen."

"Methinks, you selected a strange animal for your umpire," returned Cleveland, smiling; "I can only say, that the wolf came hither against his own inclinations; and would even now willingly turn back, if exonerated from his promise."

"I merely spoke of the light in which the vulgar would regard the transaction; for myself—or rather to continue the metaphor—for my lambs, I entertain no apprehensions."

"Do you approve, then, of the sentiment of the ancient, who said, 'I possess Lais, but Lais does not possess me'?"

"Not at all," returned the Duke, laughing; "but I do not think you are likely to disturb me in the possession of my Lais. Now, don't look affronted. Shave off your whiskers, and no young man of my acquaintance would better enact the part of Apollo. But know, my young friend, that an Apollo is not so puissant a personage among women as a Venus is among men."

"I had always imagined," said Cleveland, much amused at hearing the old roué discuss so delicate a subject, "that women set much value on external appearances."

"If you mean silks, satins, and other millinery for their sweet frames, you are right. I believe they prize dress more than all things, either in the heavens above, or the earth beneath. But if you allude to masculine beauty, trust me, the dear creatures are far too much engrossed with procuring admiration for their own charms, to have either time or inclination for admiring you. I again apologize for my rudeness, in deprecating an article of which you possess so large a stock."

"You do not then regret your departed youth?"

"Pardon me," said the Duke, with seriousness; "I never said that. No, I frankly confess, my dear Monsieur Cleveland, that I envy you—I envy you your compact and vigorous frame, which laughs at fatigue; I envy you the firmness of those youthful nerves, which brave excess with impunity—to which nothing brings

satiety,—in a word, I envy you your superior capacity for enjoyment."

"And yet you do not think that these qualities are likely to obtain, or, at any rate, insure success."

"Exactly so," said the Duke. "Armed with a handful of gold, I would fearlessly enter the lists with one, who rivalled Antinous in form, and De Grammont in manners."

"Was there not a period," said Cleveland, "in your life, when you held a different opinion?"

"Never," said the Duke; "though there was a time when my cheek was as fresh, and my frame as elastic, as your own. Unintoxicated with my youthful blood, I read the sex aright from the beginning. I purchased my first conquest like Philip of Macedon—I found no fort impregnable, where I could introduce a

bagful of gold. By these means my reputation became considerable. It grew so great, that at last my notice brought with it notoriety, and even fame. From that moment my career has been uniformly triumphant."

Cleveland recollected the success which he had constantly heard ascribed to the Duke; and felt, that whatever was the fact, he had at any rate not exaggerated his reputation. The Englishman was silent. The unbidden memories of past events rose to his remembrance, and brought unwelcome confirmation to the Duke's doctrines. His countenance became thoughtful and gloomy.

The Duke saw that the conversation was painful, and pursued it with malicious animation.

"Why," said he, "do we call the personages we read of in romances—who entertain dis-

interested attachments for each other—heroes and heroines? Why—but because we feel that they are something more than men and women. Everywhere, except in novels, marriage is a matter of bargain and sale. In every age, in every country, a pecuniary consideration is the basis on which the transaction is founded. The very laws, in most countries, hold marriage to be a valuable consideration. In uncivilized lands, where the passions speak a plain and direct language, the lover openly buys his spouse for so many skins, or so many bows and arrows. In the politer regions, settlements, dowers, handsome establishments, and position in society, constitute the actuating equivalent. But descend a little lower in the scale of society. Marriage, though the only traffic which is recognized by the sex as legal and honourable, is not the only commerce they practise; and the principle which animates the contraband dealers

is so obvious—so frankly avowed by themselves—and presses with such singular severity on the other sex, that all disguise is ridiculous. Everywhere man intrigues from the love of pleasure, and woman from the thirst of lucre."

"Are we then more high-minded than the other sex?" said Cleveland, thoughtfully.

"Not a jot. Man freely sells whatever it is in his power to dispose of—he sells his labour, his talents, his integrity, his limbs, his blood, his life, his liberty; but his passions on certain points are not his own to sell. They are not his slaves, but his masters. They sell him, and insist upon being maintained at any cost."

"But are women always voluntary agents in these matters? In marriage, are they not the victims of parental avarice? and elsewhere, do they not fall a prey to poverty and destitution, rather than to mercenary dispositions?"

"Such I know is the first and most sacred article in the veracious code of novelists, poets, and romancers. It is true that the bride's inclinations are never consulted in France; the parents manage the whole affair. And this practice, according to my views, saves the young lady the trouble of selling herself; and, according to your's, the disgrace. But other countries manage these affairs otherwise. In England, I am told they allow the young beauties to choose for themselves; and what happens there? Monsieur Cleveland, I pray you inform me truly, whether heirs-apparent are a very despised class of beings?"

The features of Cleveland underwent a momentary contraction, as if a sudden spasm of pain had shot across his breast. Quickly, however, recovering himself, he replied, "Whenever I cannot speak of my fair countrywomen with unqualified approbation, I am determined

to be altogether silent. Yet, whatever may be my own private opinion on these matters, I am surprised to hear you, of all men, avow such sentiments."

"Why so?"

"I should have imagined, that such melancholy convictions respecting the sex were inconsistent with the ardour with which you pursue them. If I hold these doctrines, they are in keeping with the apathy that you declare to be my chief characteristic. I carelessly pluck the fruit that lies within my reach; satisfied that the more distant prizes will not reward the trouble of acquisition. But you spend your whole life in a vain chase after what you denounce as worthless. For a man of gallantry like you, to pry so curiously into female motives, is surely acting like the child who cut his drum to discover the secret of the sound."

"But my toys," said the Duke, smiling, "do not charm me the less, because I am acquainted with their interior mechanism. When I listen to protestations of love and gratitude, and drink in with my ears vows of unalterable constancy—what care I whether they be true or false? Their sincerity does not affect the silver sweetness of the sound. Besides, I never intend to put them to the test. When I go to the theatre, do I the less sympathize with the sorrows of Merope, because I know that, when the play is over, Mademoiselle Ninon will compose her features—go home—make an excellent supper—and punctually call at the end of the week for her accustomed salary?—You see the analogy is strong."

"I quarrel with no man's taste," said Cleveland, gravely; "but to me it seems clear, that he who has once enjoyed the reality, will never

•be content with the fiction. The bacchanal, who has tasted the generous extract of the grape, will not afterwards be satisfied with water coloured to the same hue. The lovers of nature would smile indeed, if you should offer them the canvas mimicries of the painter, as a substitute for the rocks and woods they adore. But it is useless to multiply comparisons."

The Duke, while he affected to contradict Cleveland's opinion, seemed to take a secret delight in confirming and fixing them.

"We agree then in our theories," said he, "but how widely do we differ in our practical inferences. You, though too polite to be a cynic, and too wise to be a reformer, pass through life without relish; because you do not find the world peopled with beings exactly resembling the architypes of your own poetical imagination. I, on the contrary, have all the

enjoyment of a thorough dupe; while I escape his disappointments and mortifications, and superadd the pride and the pleasures of philosophic penetration."

The Duke de Fronsac and Cleveland had thus arrived at the same conviction, though by different paths. The bitterness of disappointment had induced these melancholy conclusions in the one, while they were the natural and necessary effects of libertinism in the other. In estimating human nature, all men are chiefly influenced by the manner in which they imagine themselves to have been personally treated by their species: and if a libertine judges by his own experience, he must, at last, unless he be the most contemptible of gulls, arrive at the miserable, deplorable opinions respecting women which the Duke so coolly avowed. But let none but the base and low-minded lose their faith in

the existence of human virtue. Cleveland, as his companion acutely rêmarked, took no relish in life, because he found nothing there which realized the expectations, or satisfied the demands, of his own pure and generous mind. The Duke, on the other hand, disbelieved in virtue with impunity; for he had degraded and depraved his tastes down to the standard of his opinions; or, perhaps, they were naturally on a level. Far from regretting the corruption which he declared to be universal, he exulted in the thoughts of the influence, which, through the medium of his immense fortune, it placed in his hands. But though the sentiments he expressed were quite sincere, the pleasure which he felt in their utterance was probably not the only motive which induced him to turn the conversation on so delicate a subject. His penetration had long ago made him acquainted with Cleveland's cha-

racter: still, in spite of this artificial coldness of disposition, and in spite of his conviction of the nullity of masculine beauty, he perhaps felt some misgivings as to the consequences which might arise from the introduction of Cleveland to the secluded beauty. It was most likely, therefore, with the view of rousing the latent feelings of dissatisfaction which he knew to exist in Cleveland's mind, and of exciting anew his disgust, at fresh illustrations of the mercenary nature of women, that he had so broadly and offensively declared his opinion of female venality.

In due time they arrived at the conclusion of their journey. Dismounting from their vehicle at a small, but pleasant village, they gave their portmanteaus and other luggage to a peasant, and proceeded to climb the hill, at the foot of which the village was situated. On reaching

the brow, a scene of great beauty burst upon their view. An immense extent of flat, but exceedingly fertile country, lay before them: golden corn fields, emerald and purple vineyards, luxuriant pastures thickly dotted with cattle and woods waving to the summer breeze, kept stretching on in interminable variety,—all gradually growing smaller and smaller, until their exceeding minuteness would have defied the accuracy of the most skilful painter; and yet, from the shortness of the distance, and the surpassing clearness of the atmosphere, each object looking as bright, and as distinct, as if it lay immediately beneath his view. People may talk as they will of mountain scenery, nothing is more beautiful than a level country, if you can but get a single hill from which to take your view. No doubt you may climb higher, and see farther in a

mountainous district; but the surrounding rocky ranges conceal the intervening vallies, and the surface of ground presented to the eye is not nearly so extensive or so beautiful. Seated on a natural step as it were of the hill, and still commanding a most extensive prospect, stood an old and ivy-covered château.

"Behold," said the Duke, "my *parc aux cerfs*."*

"Good God!" thought Cleveland, "is it in the centre of this terrestrial paradise—this spot

* The *Parc aux cerfs* was a retired chateau, dedicated to the pleasures of Louis XV. Young girls of tender age were purchased, or taken away from their parents, for the express purpose of regal prostitution. They were kept in complete ignorance of the real rank of their lover; and if unhappily for themselves they penetrated the secret, they were forced into a convent for the rest of their lives. Those of a simple or less inquiring disposition, were allowed to leave the place after a certain time, and were presented with dowries or pensions.

so crowded with all that evidences the bounty and loveliness of nature, that a cold-hearted libertine has the will and the power to fix the scene of his purchased joys and unhallowed orgies!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE VICTIM.

The housekeeper welcomed the arrival of the two gentlemen at the château. She was a middle-aged female, whose figure, in spite of its present unwieldiness and obesity, had evidently once possessed no inconsiderable share of excellence. Her complexion was prodigiously red and fiery; her eyes overflowing with moisture; the rest of the face fleshy and bloated. Her manners were bustling, important, and over-civil: in every thing she did or said, there

was a provoking air of intelligence, which was inexpressibly annoying to Cleveland.

"Where is Mademoiselle Antonia?" said the Duke.

"She is in the garden—I will go and send her to Monseigneur."

She went out, and a few moments afterwards the door opened, and a girl of about sixteen made her appearance. Prepared as Cleveland had been to behold a very lovely specimen of humanity, he was completely dazzled and overwhelmed by her extraordinary beauty.

She was a brunette, possessing to the fullest extent all the peculiar advantages of that style; —the exquisite fineness of skin, the rich warm complexion, the soft dark lustrous eyes, the jetty ringlets. In addition to these important points, her features were formed with that Grecian regularity, that perfect symmetry,

which we so seldom see in living beings, that we are sometimes tempted to suppose it the mere offspring of the painter and sculptor's imagination. But Antonia possessed a beauty which is much more rare among the higher ranks of society than a fascinating physiognomy. Among the wealthier classes of almost every country, you will see abundance of angelic faces, but very few really good figures can be found. The habits and modes of education which prevail among these classes, restrain young females from taking the exercise that can alone develope that exquisite muscular fulness, without which there may be grace, but can be no beauty.

No doubt, the young ladies are much better occupied in practising concertos, and sitting on high-backed stools working samplers; but still it is a pity to see so many lean throats, scraggy shoulders, thin bosoms, spare flaccid arms,

crooked spines, unequal hips, and ricketty ancles, more especially when surmounted, as they are in many cases, by such sweet and interesting countenances.

It is not enough to call Antonia's figure faultless,—it was noble—it was glorious—it was perfect. It is nothing to say, that no man under thirty could have surveyed it without emotion. The most envious woman, the most stupid child, could not have gazed on it without pleasure—a pleasure arising from the gratified perception of extreme beauty, and exquisite harmony of proportion. Her dress, too, or rather undress, was admirably contrived to display her charms. She had not formed her raven curls into a mass of pomatum and powder, as the fashion of the day imperatively required—a hideous and disgusting practice, which some prematurely grey-headed and partially-bald

beauty first introduced, and which the rest of her countrywomen, unlike the sapient foxes in the fable, who declined to dock their brushes at the interested solicitation of a tail-less brother, eagerly followed and adopted. She wore a sort of fancy dressing-gown, rich and striking enough in its way, but which a Parisian lady would have deemed an indelible dishonour to have borne anywhere but at her toilette—

> "Leaving every beauty free
> To sink or swell as heaven pleases."

How different from the preposterous hoops which were then worn, and which assigned to all women, whether young or old, stout or slender—whether they were bent dowagers of seventy, or married ladies about to increase their family, or slim virgins of sixteen—one uniform and hideous rotundity of figure.

Cleveland gazed on Antonia's beauty with

melancholy interest. "Can it be," thought he, "that this bright creature is doomed even from the first flush of youth to lead a life of infamy and misery, thinly gilded over by precarious splendour? Are those charms, so fit to have inspired the purest enthusiasm and affection, destined only to sate the worn-out appetites of a loveless debauchee? Will nature and fortune never cease playing at cross purposes? Why is the man whom fate sentences to play the part of underling, tormented with a genius to make him discontented and miserable? Why is the woman whom circumstances are certain to place in the power of the vicious and the corrupt, cursed with the fatal gift of beauty?"

The subject of the foregoing reflection, when she espied who was in the apartment, ran up to the Duke, and received from him the embrace,

which at that day was the ordinary mode of salutation among intimate acquaintance.

"Allow me," said the Duke, turning round with a triumphant air to Cleveland, "allow me to introduce my friend Monsieur Cleveland, an English gentleman."

Antonia curtesied with that peculiar grace that all her movements exhibited.

"And how, Antonia," said the Duke, "have you been passing your time since I last saw you?"

"In counting," replied Antonia affectionately, "how many days would elapse before you returned."

"Is this hypocrisy or infatuation?" thought Cleveland.

"You will make me vain, Antonia," said the Duke, glancing another triumphant look at Cleveland.

"Nay, you are laughing at me," replied Antonia; "the natural gratitude of a simple girl can hardly be a very intoxicating homage to the Baron de Voisenon."

"Gratitude!" thought Cleveland, "that is strange—gratitude for seducing her, or purchasing her from her parents!"

The Duke no longer looked triumphant, but hastened to change the subject.

"Well, Monsieur Cleveland, what think you of my château; it is a fine old building, is it not?"

"Pardon me, Duke, but I have not yet had time to examine your mansion; my attention has been absorbed by a fairer object."

To Cleveland's extreme surprise, a deep blush overspread Antonia's countenance.

"Unhappy inconsistent girl!" thought he, "you have ceased to feel shame at the loss of

innocence, and yet blush at a commonplace compliment."

"Blush away, Antonia!" cried the Duke, "you look charming—all the perfumers of Paris will hardly match such carmine as that. By heavens! Cleveland, I shall make you teach me the art of manufacturing these pretty nothings."

"Are you sure, my dear Baron," interrupted Antonia, "that they would have the same efficacy from your mouth?"

"Indiscreet, too!" thought Cleveland, "with all her affectation of affection."

"Pray, Monsieur Cleveland," said Antonia, "is it true what I have read in some travels, that in your country the single women are allowed to partake of the pleasures of society with as much freedom as the married ladies?"

Cleveland assured her that such was undoubtedly the case.

"Ah! England must be a delightful country for such personages as myself."

Cleveland felt it no part of his duty to explain to the young lady that personages like herself were rigidly excluded in England from respectable society; so he was silent.

"My dear Baron," said Antonia, turning to the Duke, "let us make a voyage to England."

"Alas! Mademoiselle," said Cleveland, "the change of atmosphere will not improve my friend. We have the reputation of being one of the most jealous nations in Europe."

"A jealous nation!" repeated Antonia, with a puzzled air. "But what of that, Monsieur? I did not speak of jealousy."

"Yes, Antonia," said the Duke, interfering in some confusion; "you did—or, what is the same thing, Cleveland did. In fact, I am jealous, my dear Antonia—very jealous; I wish you to live wholly for me."

"Here is a pretty confession," cried Antonia, laughing. "Well, I've sometimes suspected, when you were talking of the impossibility of breaking through the usages of society, that you wished to keep me all to yourself."

"A not unnatural feeling under existing circumstances," thought Cleveland. "I wonder the suspicion never crossed her mind before."

The Duke smiled, but made no answer.

There was an unaccountable air of embarrassment and timidity in his demeanour on the present occasion, which was alike inconsistent with his general character, and the usual boldness and self-possession of his manners.

An awkward pause in the conversation ensued, which Cleveland broke, by making an observation on the beauty of the prospect, which the windows of the château commanded.

"Yes, it is lovely," replied Antonia; "and I

have often gazed on it with delight; but, somehow or other, all solitary pleasures so soon weary me. I am afraid I have no imagination—for, after awhile, I turn away from yon varied landscape, to play with my kitten or my squirrel. Even they have more sympathy with me than the woods and fields. They fondle me when I caress them, and bite and scratch me when I teaze them; but whether I am sad or merry, yonder rich scene always smiles upon me with unmoved and unregarding loveliness."

Cleveland was forcibly struck with her remark. "Yes," rejoined he, "you are right. Life alone can sympathize with life. It is in vain that, in our moments of misanthropy and disgust, we would endeavour to dispense with the companionship of man. It is in vain that we rush into the untrodden solitude, and there pour forth the long hoarded feelings of our

bursting hearts. The rocks and forests answer us not—soothe us not. And if poets dream they do, they mistake the echoes of their own overwrought imaginations for the responsive voice of nature. Yes, you are right, Mademoiselle, the company of the humblest of our four-footed creatures is preferable to perpetual solitude."

Antonia might be said rather to drink in than to listen to this animated commentary upon her feelings. It was caviare to the Duke, who was no more than a sharp, sensible, wily man of the world, and, consequently, unable to appreciate such feelings; but he began to take umbrage at the pleasure which they obviously took in each other's conversation.

"All this poetry," quoth he, sarcastically, "means, I presume, when translated into the language of common sense, that Monsieur

Cleveland's society would be a great improvement on the company of hills, trees, squirrels, and kittens."

Antonia's countenance was instantly dyed of the deepest crimson—and this time, her features wore an expression, which showed that the blush was the result of pain.

"Inconceivably strange!" thought Cleveland, "that the loss of virtue should be compatible with the retention of such exquisite sensibility."

"A pretty compliment," resumed the Duke, "you have just paid to my powers of companionship—even that beautiful blush shall not prove your pardon. You confessed yourself reduced to herd with quadrupeds, and yet never, in your utmost distress, bethought yourself of my society."

"Ah! my dear Sir, do not be jealous," said Antonia, in her most winning manner. "But

the truth is, you are the worst companion in the world for a sentimental young lady—you are so bitter and hard-hearted in your conversation; though in your conduct, I freely confess, that you are kinder to me than any father could be."

The word father jarred upon the ears and feelings of the sexagenarian lover: he made a gesture expressive of irritation, and said, in an acrimonious tone: "Well! instead of so much fine feeling and poetry, which though they may mystify the brain, cannot satisfy our hunger,—suppose you give Monsieur Cleveland and myself a little substantial refreshment after our long journey."

Antonia obeyed this ungracious request with the utmost cheerfulness, and summoned to her councils the red-faced housekeeper, of whom we whilome spake. A splendid collation soon made its appearance.

A variety of interesting conversation between the Duke, Cleveland, and Antonia, followed the repast. The young Englishman was much struck with the extraordinary natural talents displayed by Antonia. He was astonished at the liveliness and originality of her conversation; but the quality of all others which impressed him with admiration, was the utter absence of all affectation or conceit—that epidemic disease of genius. His commiseration was soon deeply excited, by the view which he took of her future fate. To behold so clear and noble an intellect—so pure and delicate a spirit, shrined in a form which might have tempted the sons of God, as of old, to leave their own bright spheres, and prove the pleasures of terrestrial love, — to behold her entering that fatal career, which must eventually tarnish her beauty and corrupt her soul,—irresistibly filled him with melancholy. But, by

degrees, doubts and suspicions as to the real nature of her connexion with the Duke, began to steal over him. He could not reconcile the unrestrained ease and innocence of her manners with the position which the Duke represented her to occupy. If she had fallen, she was evidently not depraved or vicious. Yet, she freely approached subjects of conversation, which, in her supposed situation, the smallest remains of delicacy would have made her avoid with the most scrupulous caution.

Every look, word, and tone, indicated the most perfect tranquillity of conscience: no external wincing betrayed the inward sore. Her demeanour towards the Duke was affectionate, but filial; her attachment was obviously that which a daughter entertains for a father, or a ward for a guardian; not that which a mistress feels, or affects to feel, for a lover. The Duke's

manner tended to corroborate the inferences which Cleveland was disposed to draw from Antonia's behaviour: his confusion and irritation whenever she alluded to the obligations she had received from him, and the filial gratitude which she felt in return, seemed to indicate that he wished her affection to be attributed to other motives; at least, his strange embarrassment on these occasions appeared inexplicable upon any other supposition. But when after much cogitation and infinite reasonings upon the minutest particulars of her conduct, he at last arrived at the conclusion, that she was still pure and innocent, an awkward question would suggest itself, how long would she remain in that state? By some unknown means she had evidently been placed in the Duke's power, and was moreover bound to him by the strong ties of gratitude. He knew this nobleman, both from the reports

of others, and indeed from his own confession, was lax in his opinions, and unscrupulous in his practice,—a roué, whose best morality was a sort of systematized selfishness; whose highest idea of self-denial was the postponement of a small present pleasure to a greater future one; the only efficient checks on whose passions were the legal consequence of his acts: and even the narrow operation of this restraint was much diminished by the man's natural physical hardihood, his high rank, his boundless fortune, and the extensive influence which he enjoyed both with the court and the magistracy. The laws of France, anterior to the revolution of seventeen hundred and eighty-nine, were mere cobwebs, which entangled only the small flies, and constantly allowed the great ones to break through. How was an isolated, friendless girl, ever to obtain justice against the powerful, wealthy Duke

de Fronsac?—the idea was preposterous. He was not in his own country, where strict and impartial justice is freely dispensed to every body who can afford to pay for it. Here an usurer might lavish his whole fortune in vain, to procure justice from a court lord: influence predominated even over money. Yes; Antonia's fate, even if not already sealed, was certain, if she remained much longer in the Duke's hands.

Well, then, should he advertise the unsuspicious girl of her real situation? should he warn her of her peril, and aid her to escape? At this conclusion, another train of ideas rushed across his mind, the result of that selfish and bitter wisdom, which experience teaches in the school of disappointment. Why should he interfere? what business was it of his? Was it not the fixed and eternal decree of nature, that the hawk should tear the dove—that the wolf

should devour the lamb—that the vigorous plant should absorb the strength and moisture of the weaker shrub beside it—that the strong and the powerful, in short, of all kinds and species, should prey upon and destroy the weak and helpless? And was he to step forward and attempt to thwart the operations of this universal law, and say, "No act which militates against my peculiar notions of morality shall be performed within the sphere of my intelligence." Idle and ridiculous idea! worse than Quixotic madness! Better at once, like La Mancha's knight, clap the barber's bason on his head, and sally forth on a lean mare, against the surrounding windmills,—less extravagant by far than to approach the enormous mass of human misery—a mountain to which the highest peak of the Andes is but a molehill—and plucking from thence a single pebble, to imagine that he had

dimished the mountain's bulk. Aye, but supposing that pebble were a precious gem, which he wished to win for his own coffer? That would alter the affair, would it not? True, but was this the case? Could it be, that he, the apostle of philosophic indifference—the stoic of the world of fashion and pleasure—could it be, that he, without the excuse of boyish blood, was about to commit the ineffable folly of falling in love? Was he again going to pin his heart and happiness on a girl's sleeve?—no, no; let the Duke devour his prey in tranquillity—why should he interfere? Suppose he broke the meshes of the web which detained the bright and gilded butterfly, what would be the result? The spider-like duke would rearrange his plans, and speedily catch another, as beautiful—no, not as beautiful—that was impossible, but as deserving of pity: so, after all, this feat of dis-

interested benevolence and heroic generosity, would resolve itself into a substitution of one innocent victim for another, who was not the first by millions, nor would be the last by myriads, that was sacrificed to the gratification of a stronger fellow-creature. Besides, and above all, was he certain that she would thank him for his interference? Was she so unlike her sister moths, as to be insensible to the glare of wealth, the tinsel splendour of rank? When raised to the station of mistress to the Duke de Fronsac, she might be very likely to consider herself as the most enviable, not the most wretched of women.

Such were the contradictory reflections that passed through Cleveland's mind, when he retired at the close of the day to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WARNING.

The next morning the Duke asked Cleveland whether he had passed sufficient time in Antonia's company to form a fair estimate of her charms, and to qualify himself to pronounce the decision which was expected from him respecting the comparative merits of the rival beauties?

Cleveland answered in the affirmative.

The Duke then intimated that he would not detain him one moment from the pleasures of Paris.

Cleveland understood the hint, and announced his intention of immediately returning thither. Antonia frankly expressed her surprise and regret, that Cleveland would not prolong his visit. The Duke appeared to be animated by the same feeling, but seemed so convinced of the inflexibility of Cleveland's resolution, that he abstained from all repetition of his entreaties.

On arriving at the village in the vicinity of the château, Cleveland reluctantly commenced his journey. At every step the horses took, fresh arguments against the impolicy and uselessness of interference suggested themselves; but all this time his inclinations to warn Antonia of her impending danger were increasing in a still greater ratio. At last, after he had proceeded four or five miles, he determined not to put it out of his power to interfere, in case, after farther consideration of the subject, he should be disposed

to adopt such a course. With this view he discontinued his journey, and alighted at a small auberge by the road side.

When he had concluded his arrangements with the landlord, he strolled forth, with the intention of coming to some determination during his walk. Involuntarily, perhaps almost unconsciously, he began to retrace the road to the château. He had certainly no fixed and definite plans in taking this path. He had no scheme to execute when he should have reached the château; nevertheless he continued to pace along; his mind still occupied by contending thoughts, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. At the expiration of two hours he had reached the summit of the hill, which was described as overlooking the château. He now no longer, as when he first stood on that eminence, surveyed the prospect

below, but fixed his eager gaze on the château and its surrounding inclosures, with feelings that he was ashamed to analyse or define. Why had he returned to that spot? A mocking spirit seemed to ask him what was his real motive? Was it not a vague half-formed wish to see Antonia once more? Was she not in truth the magnet which had attracted him thither? Had then all the philosophic vows and resolutions which he had sworn in the hour of bitterness and disappointment melted into thin air? Did not the present moment see him sculking about a mansion, where he was not wanted nor invited, in the hopes of catching a short and furtive glance of one who had never given him the smallest encouragement? Indignant at his weakness, for such his conduct now appeared to him, he turned to depart.

By what infinitely slight events is the whole

future course of our destiny directed! Upon what inexpressibly trivial accidents hangs the misery or the happiness of half a century of coming existence! He turned to depart. A minute more had seen him gain the other side of the hill; he would have retraced his road to the auberge in hasty anger at his own indecision and vacillation, would have set off for Paris by the next conveyance, and would have forgotten the whole affair in a week. He turned to depart,—but before his lingering and reverted eye had quite lost sight of the grounds which surrounded the château, he espied a female figure strolling at their extreme verge. He felt certain it was Antonia. In an instant his former decision was reversed. Hitherto his mind had been swayed to and fro by inclinations and ideas of almost equal weight and power. A new impression strikes his senses: the idea is con-

veyed into his mind, flung into the wavering balance, and the scale is turned. He made a circuit to avoid the observation of the inmates of the château, and soon arrived at the spot. His conjecture proved to be well founded. It was Antonia. She seemed also to be wandering in a musing meditating mood.

Her eyes were fixed on the ground. At his approach she raised them,—a smile of pleasure irradiated her face; Cleveland saluted her.

"Ah!" cried she, "to what lucky accident do we owe this unexpected pleasure? Have you yielded to the Baron's entreaties to renew your visit?"

"I came hither, Mademoiselle, uninvited. The Baron, as you call him, dreaded nothing so much as that I should prolong my visit;—had I complied with his feigned entreaties, he would speedily have retracted them."

"I presume," said Antonia coldly, "the Baron has excellent reasons for his conduct."

"No doubt," observed Cleveland, "he has reasons strong and sufficient—for their moral excellence I think you can hardly vouch."

"May I ask, Monsieur, if your sole purpose in coming hither was to insult my best friend and benefactor?"

"Your attachment, then, is founded on gratitude—no warmer sentiment has mingled with your feelings?"

"What warmer sentiment," replied Antonia, growing somewhat irritated at the continuance of this strange conversation, "what warmer sentiment can exist than the affection borne towards a father by the child of his adoption?"

"Poor innocence!" muttered Cleveland, "you will be soon taught to feel or feign a deeper and stronger emotion.—You do not

then wish or aspire to be the Baroness de Voisenon?"

"By what right," replied Antonia, "do you put such strange and idle questions? But if the gratification of such frivolous curiosity can give you pleasure, know that I entertain no other feelings to the Baron but those of gratitude and filial affection."

"I presume then, Mademoiselle," continued Cleveland, "that you have still less inclination to become his mistress?"

"Begone, Sir," exclaimed Antonia, her eyes sparkling and her cheek crimsoned with indignation. "Begone; I deserved this when I continued to listen to you after you had spoken slightingly of the Baron. The man who can malign his absent friend, may well take pleasure in insulting an unprotected female."

"Listen to me, young lady. The man whom

you fondly rely upon as your parent, has not even communicated to you his real name and station. He is no other than the celebrated Duke de Fronsac—a name renowned in the annals of gallantry. He represented you to me as his mistress—start not, but hear me. The confident innocence of your manner excited my doubts as to the reality of the fact. Some traits in the Duke's behaviour confirmed my suspicions. I determined to apprize you of your condition; I have accomplished my design, and I now bid you adieu."

"Stay, Sir, one moment," said Antonia faintly; "Oh God! my brain turns round!—what proof can you give of this horrible tale, that I should all at once cease to confide in one I have trusted so long?"

"None," answered Cleveland coldly; "disbelieve me if you like, till time confirms my story."

"Pardon me, Sir, I naturally believe with bitter reluctance a statement that deprives me of the only friend I possess in the world. If the Baron be, indeed, the cruel profligate you describe him, allow me to say that I only know you as his intimate and chosen companion;—it is not an unjust rule by which we form an opinion of a man from his voluntary associates. Your pursuits and amusements can hardly be very different from his own;—why should you feel such indignation against what must be a common occurrence in both your lives, as to induce you to take part against your friend?"

"Faith! I scarcely know myself," returned Cleveland, "if it is not the worst act I ever performed, neither is it the wisest. Had the Duke wooed you openly to become his leman, as our old ballads say, you would have heard no homilies from me when you had accepted his

suit; but I thought you had hardly the fair average chance of escape or resistance, when unaware of your position; nevertheless, pray impute my interference to what motive you will —a sudden fit of officiousness—a passing whim—an idle freak, derived from a natural instinctive love of fair play;—and this reason is perhaps the true one."

"Would, Sir," rejoined Antonia, in an agony of indecision, "would that you had either never awakened these suspicions of my benefactor, for such I must still call him, or else had proof sufficient to confirm them. Is it possible to conceive, that any human being could for years keep heaping favours on another only to destroy him at last?"

"Yes," quietly replied Cleveland, "it is very conceivable. The custom is not even peculiar to civilized people; the cannibals are wont to fatten their victims before they devour them."

"You do not regard the services of the Baron in that light: my father was his friend, an Italian nobleman, who died suddenly in embarrassed circumstances. The Baron has supplied his place with more than a parent's care—educated, protected me: no, no—I cannot, will not, doubt him. I would rather persist in the belief of his truth and goodness, than owe my escape to the violation of all the most cherished feelings which have hitherto constituted my happiness. Farewell, Sir; I do not impugn your motives, but I will trust rather to deeds and actions, than to unsupported suspicions and surmises."

"Be it so, Mademoiselle; I expected no other result from my thankless mission. If, in the meanwhile, a new spirit should come over your sole protector—the innocent and single-minded Baron—and should you find his future conduct savour more of gallantry than benevolence, you may possibly be at a loss for allies. I do not

call myself a friend; I am not anxious to force myself on you as such; but if my money, advice, or protection, can avail you, fear not to remind me of my present offer. I live in the Rue de Bourgogne, Paris; Mademoiselle, I have the honour to wish you a very good day."

With these words he departed, little satisfied with the impression he had produced on Mademoiselle Antonia's mind; but more than ever convinced of her exceeding and superlative beauty.

The reader may, perhaps, be surprised at the cold and even callous tone adopted by our hero during the foregoing interview. But Cleveland took a morbid and perverse pleasure in affecting an appearance of apathy and insensibility. A portion only of this character was genuine. No doubt many of his feelings were seared by disappointment, or worn-out by premature and

overwrought excitement; but he was very far from being the cold-blooded marble-hearted man that he delighted to represent himself.

By the premature death of his parents, Cleveland was left at an early age uncontrolled master of himself and a handsome fortune.

He was immediately surrounded by a host of friends, who all seemed eager to instruct him in the art of enjoying life and spending money. Conscious of possessing many engaging personal qualities, Cleveland thought all this attachment exceedingly natural, and the idea of imputing any portion of it to selfish or designing motives never entered his head. What a career was before him! What a delightful world seemed to him this planet called earth! Bold and impetuous, fearing nothing but dulness, thirsting after excitement,—let him but catch a glimpse of aught that wore the appearance of pleasure,

and he rushed at the object, as a young lion flings himself on his prey. We have said he was courageous by nature; had he been menaced on every side by pains and perils, he would still have stood firm and undaunted; but fenced as he was with such triple armour against the shafts of misfortune, and placed in an Eden of hope and happiness, was it to be wondered at if he felt himself invincible to care or sorrow?—if, in the plenitude of his youth, strength, popularity, and riches, he bid defiance to all earthly ills? He doubted the very existence of evil. True, he sometimes met even in his gay circle with hollow eyes and furrowed cheeks, and voices whose tones were dreary, and spoke of past misfortune. But what of them? They were bilious or ill-tempered. True, as he sometimes caracolled on his fiery steed along the sunny highway, he was startled by the aspect of disease

and misery—what of that?—the poor wretch was an exception to the general law of happiness. Then flinging to the beggar an amount of pecuniary relief which made the mendicant deem his benefactor either mad or drunk, he chased the unpleasant image from his mind, and passed on to new pleasures. No—no—misfortune and sorrow could never reach him;—his own resources were immense—inexhaustible—and even should they be drained by his boundless prodigality, had he not a crowd of friends, who would all lay down their lives and fortunes to serve him? He could not for a moment doubt they would—they had told him so themselves!

No marvel that he was popular among his associates. Was any costly scheme of pleasure suggested to Cleveland, he never rested till he had executed it. Was a villa on the Thames to be purchased for some summer amusement—

"Cleveland's your man." Was a magnificent fête to be given to all London, with the laudable intention of utterly blasting a score of obnoxious individuals, who were to be excluded from it, or of putting one or two leaders of fashion to a slow death, by the lingering pangs of envy—"Cleveland will enjoy the idea." Did an economical admirer of the old masters lament his inability to purchase some gem of Coreggio or Titian—"Get Cleveland to buy it; he will be tired of it in a month, and sell it you for the value of the frame." But for all this, Cleveland had his reward. He was unanimously pronounced, by a band of impartial, disinterested friends, to be the finest fellow in the world. What head could withstand such intoxicating flattery? On spurred Cleveland, and, the faster he galloped along the road to ruin, the more animating were the cheers,

and the more deafening were the huzzas. When he got to the end, the applause ceased. The mode in which this event took place was as follows. A dear friend of Cleveland's had a favourite racer, who for two years had carried all before him. As an ingenious device of extricating Cleveland from his embarrassment, he proposed that the latter should purchase, at a considerable sum, this phœnix of horses; assuring him, that he was the only person in the world whom he could endure to see in the possession of such an inestimable treasure. The result may be guessed. Cleveland bought the horse, backed it largely, and, for the first time since its birth, the animal was distanced. Dispirited at his ill luck, Cleveland called on his brother in misfortune, the seller, who he supposed had backed the animal to a greater amount than himself. Never was a man more

mistaken. By a sudden inspiration of prudence, the friend had reversed all his plans about a week before the race, and though he had not thought it worth while to communicate so trivial a fact to Cleveland, he now asked that young gentleman to wish him joy of his success. Cleveland could not refrain from some bitter remarks. The friend retaliated by the utmost rudeness. Cleveland demanded satisfaction, and received it in the shape of a bullet in the hip. During the first days of his illness, he wrote to a young lady to whom he was engaged to be married, and, after apprizing her of the loss of the greater part of his fortune, released her from all the promises which she had entered into with him. At the same time he intimated, that if he could persuade her to voluntarily renew their past engagement, he should deem his other misfortunes of little consequence.

His fever increased so much, that it was thought advisable to keep back the answer.

At last the leaden pellet of satisfaction was extracted, and the patient began to recover.

On leaving his sick room, the first news that saluted his ears, was the marriage of his jockey friend to his betrothed. The effect of this blow was at first overwhelming. He shut himself up in a dark room, and determined to turn misanthrope, like Timon of old. Accustomed to a round of perpetual excitement, he found this occupation unendurably dull; so he cleaned and furbished his duelling pistols, and began to moralize about suicide. What step he might next have taken, it is impossible to say. His lucky star saved him the trouble of deciding, and once more placed at his disposal the means which he had so recklessly flung away.

A man of science, who thought the greatest

happiness in life consisted in chipping off the corners of rocks, and then ascertaining, by a difficult, tedious, and troublesome process, of what elements they were composed—in other words, an eminent mineralogist—had, a short time back, requested permission of Cleveland to examine and inspect one of his deeply mortgaged estates in Cornwall.

Cleveland, who laboured under a physical incapability of saying no—who never refused any request, whether reasonable or the reverse, of course granted his consent. The mineralogist fell to work with his accustomed activity. Prying, poking, and chipping, with ceaseless vigilance, in every hole, nook, cranny, corner, slip, chasm, and cave, that the county contained; and then pulverizing, fusing, dissolving, precipitating, filtrating, and weighing the chips,

with as much care and anxiety as if his life depended on the particular number of grains of silica and alumina which each fragment contained. He had not pursued this exciting avocation more than a few days, when he discovered a tin mine, where no human being had ever suspected one before. A mining company greedily bought the property, at an enormous price, and Cleveland, after paying all his incumbrances, found himself a richer man than ever.

His first care was to present the scientific rock-chipper with a munificent present. His second, was to determine what course of conduct he should pursue on his return to the world. He arrived at the sage conclusion, as is usual in these cases, that the reverse of wrong must be perfectly right. "I can neither live in a dark room, nor in the desert, like Timon. I quite

agree with Apemantus, a gentleman can't dispense with servants.

> ———" 'What, think'st
> That the bleak air, thy boisterous chamberlain,
> Will put thy shirt on warm? Will these mossed trees,
> That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
> And skip when thou point'st out? Will the cold brook,
> Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste,
> To cure thy o'ernight's surfeit?'

I must live with mankind; but henceforth my intercourse shall be regulated on a new principle. They are excellent acquaintance, but dangerous friends. I will amuse myself with them as companions, but will never again sacrifice my interests in the hope of winning their attachment. It is a bad speculation to attempt to purchase sympathy."

Cleveland might imagine these sentiments to be the effect of philosophy, guided by experience; but they were, in truth, the result of pride and

wounded feelings. Nothing annoyed him more, than to insinuate that he was at all affected by the perfidy and defalcation of his friends. The more he suffered, the more anxious was he to conceal his pain, under the mask of insensibility and carelessness. He could not endure that they who had trampled on his tenderest feelings, should farther insult him, either by pity or scorn.

Society was completely deceived, and never entertained the slightest suspicion of the tumultuous host of angry and lacerated emotions which were struggling and writhing beneath that imperturbably calm exterior. No doubt time, "the only comforter where the heart hath bled," at last assuaged the bitterness of his feelings; but Cleveland's youthful eagerness, and excitability of character, never returned. He had become remarkable by his peculiar

manners. Perhaps vanity had induced him to retain them. Perhaps, though his wounded spirit was healed, there still remained a tenderness and soreness about the scar, which made him shrink from intimate and familiar contact with mankind. Perhaps he gratified some secret grudge, which lurked at the bottom of his heart against mankind, by showing a contemptuous indifference to all that excited their hopes, fears, sympathy, and admiration.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DECISION.

At length the day arrived on which Cleveland had promised to pronounce his decision. The party who had assembled at the Duke de Fronsac's hotel, were pretty nearly the same as on the previous occasion. Cleveland came late. Hardly were the common salutations over, when his opinion on the respective beauties was eagerly demanded.

"Hail, gentle Paris!" cried the Chevalier de Crespigny, in a mock-heroic voice; "to

which deity hast thou assigned the apple? to the goddess of the town or country?"

"I have no hesitation in saying, that the young lady to whom I had the honour of being introduced by the Duke de Fronsac, very far exceeds in beauty the celebrated La Gabrielle—"

A shout of admiration, for which it would be difficult to discover any reasonable cause, followed this announcement.

The Marquis de Montolieu bit his lip, and said: "Monsieur Cleveland, you had not finished speaking;—you were about to add something."

"Yes," replied Cleveland; "since I have undertaken this office, it is expedient I should perform it with justice. I still entertain some doubts, whether our noble host can in strictness claim the victory, and call upon his antagonist to pay the bet."

"Explain yourself," cried a dozen voices.

"The Duke de Fronsac described the lady, on whose beauty the bet was laid, as being under his protection; using that phrase, not in its moral and literal acceptation, but in its most significant and fashionable sense. Now, the lady does indeed appear to be under his protection, but, as far as I could judge from her manners and conversation, is not, in plain terms, his mistress."

"This changes the whole affair," said the Marquis de Montolieu, "and must be explained."

"The Duke is accused of virtue," observed Beaumarchais; "he must instantly vindicate his character from so heinous an imputation."

"Who," exclaimed the Chevalier de Crespigny, "that knew the Duke de Fronsac, could ever have anticipated that he would one day

fall a victim to his own morality, and lose a thousand louis by his excessive chastity ?"

" The most dissolute martyr that I ever had the honour to form an acquaintance with !" exclaimed Count D'Ostalis, taking a pinch of snuff.

" A rare and exquisite trait of modern manners !" said Crespigny. " There has been nothing like it since the days of Scipio."

" Beaumarchais !" cried another, " do not let such self-sacrificing virtue be lost to posterity for want of an historian. I conjure you, by the memory of the eleven thousand virgins, to publish a short account of the matter. You can entitle it the " Continence of the Duke de Fronsac," or " The Grape-bearing Thistle."

" Gentleman," said the Duke de Fronsac, " I am sorry to stop the present current of sparkling things, even though it is flowing

against myself. But as the Marquis de Montolieu requires, and is in fact entitled to, an explanation, I will give it. The young lady whom I introduced to Monsieur Cleveland, is indeed, as he has intimated, a true maiden, pure and spotless, and intact; and the discovery of the fact does remarkable honour to his penetration. But is she on that account not to be considered as mine, when I have absolute and complete controul over her destiny? Circumstances have placed her in my power as effectually as this fragile glass, which I hold in my hand; and I can make her mine, in any sense, whenever I please. Can it be said that the delicacies which crown our festive table—which were purchased by us, and prepared for us—which only await the first revival of our languid appetite—are not our own, because we have not actually devoured them? Will it be said that

the fruit tree, which we have trained up, and cultivated with unceasing care, in the most sheltered recess of our garden, is not our own before we have plucked the produce?"

"A very instructive and philosophical parallel," observed Count D'Ostalis, with great gravity.

"Humph!" said the Marquis; "a meal can't elope from your board; nor a fruit tree climb over your garden-walls; but a young lady may do both."

"Nay," cried the Chevalier de Crespigny; "I think De Fronsac's argument fair and plausible enough."

"The matter," said the young Vicomte de Valmont, with affected solemnity, "had better be submitted to the parliament of Paris."

"No!" interrupted Beaumarchais; "the question is too delicate and dignified for the

decision of the lawyers. I say, refer the case to the Sorbonne."

"I demur to that proposition," cried the Duke, laughing; "the right reverend theologians would all demand a personal interview with the personages of the case; and I fear they would corrupt my little angel. What say you, Marquis? would you trust them with La Gabrielle?"

"Be assured," interposed the Chevalier, "they would never ask to see La Gabrielle. No doubt most of them are well acquainted with her already. La Gabrielle, with her wild imagination, is just the girl to have patronized an archbishop, from an innocent love of variety."

A thousand similar impertinences followed these sallies. At last the indelicate controversy was settled, by a suggestion of the Chevalier

de Crespigny. He proposed, that when De Fronsac should declare the fruit to be plucked, that the Marquis should pay the amount of the bet; but until that event should take place, the wager should be considered as undecided.

CHAPTER XV.

LETTER I.

My dear Marquis,—

So you call yourself old! old forsooth! Old at fifty!—no, my dear Marquis, you are not old, but certainly mad to talk or dream of old age at fifty. Why fifty is the prime of life!—the meridian of existence! Nay, if you doubt the assertion, I will prove it to you. Suppose a man of good constitution, guarded by some supernatural power against all external accidents and internal disease;—pray

how long would such an individual live before he died of downright old age?—why a hundred years at least. This period, then, is the natural term of human life.

I admit that very few attain this advanced age, because a thousand plaguy diseases cut people short before their whole thread is unravelled. Look how fever, consumption, and a host of other ghastly tyrants, mow us down like grass.

Nevertheless, I repeat my assertion, that if these frail machines of flesh and blood, which we call our bodies, could be secured against all accidental and premature causes of death, and were allowed to puff in and out the vital air in peace and safety, until they gradually tumbled to pieces before the mouldering touch of our only legitimate and inevitable destroyer, extreme old age, a century and upwards would be the ordinary space of human life.

What, then, do you mean by writing to me about the dark and lengthening shadows which every object at your time of life must be expected to wear? Our time of life, forsooth! Have I not proved that our time of life is the meridian of existence? Well, then, there can be no shadows at twelve o'clock in the day; the thing is astronomically impossible. When you fancy you see shadows, you are in reality contemplating the gloom of your own mind. It is the darkness of your own eye that makes the scene appear obscured.

You tell me you no longer feel sufficient spirits and activity to carry on intrigues. Admitting the fact, what is the moral? Simply this, that you must henceforth manage to procure pleasure without intrigue. In fact, the trouble of wooing a woman in due form,—of breathing ardent sighs and whispering tender

speeches, is only fit for boys of twenty, who are oppressed with a superabundance of life. Men of our age (that is, in the prime of life) ought not to waste their vitality in such unprofitable gambols. Not that I like ready-made love either. That dish is only suited to the glutton, and would speedily disgust refined epicures like us. What course remains to be adopted, you will then ask? In answer to this question, I will relate to you a trifling passage in my life, over which I trust you will ponder, and grow wise by example.

Four years ago, I chanced to be travelling through the Papal States. In passing through a hamlet on the road to Perugia, one of the wheels of my carriage came off, and I was forced to halt till the injury could be repaired. My vehicle was dragged to the village blacksmith. As I was watching the slow processes of the

furnace and anvil, a child's shrieks were loudly heard. The door of the smithy was thrown open, and in rushed a young girl, pursued by a furious virago, who was brandishing aloft a formidable stick.

The former, in an agony of terror, cowered at my feet, clasped my knees, and entreated me to save her; before I could interpose, the woman—(in fact she was so absorbed by rage that I do not think she saw me)—came up with the object of her pursuit, and aimed a tremendous stroke at her head. It took effect, however, not on the girl's head, but on my unfortunate leg. The blow nearly swept me off the ground. For five minutes I swore at her in good native French; for the Italian oaths did not come fast enough for the occasion. At last, when I became sufficiently cool to use the imprecations of her own language, I asked the woman how

she could be such an execrable brute as to strike her daughter with a cudgel, which, however well it might be adapted for the fustigation of her own brawny shoulders, could not be applied to a tender girl without endangering her life. Frightened at her mistake, and half ashamed of her cruelty, she mumbled in a deprecating tone that the child was none of her's. The smith, hearing his wife attacked on this point, came forward and said, "Monsignore, it is a hard thing to support the burthen of a child which is not your own." "How," said I, "not your own?" "No, Monsignore; she was brought here by a holy father, nearly ten years ago, seemingly only a few weeks old. He bid us take all manner of care of the infant, and gave us a handsome sum of money. He then told us he would call again that day six months, and give us as much more. The father punctually

returned on the appointed day, asked if the child was well, put down the money, and set off again without interchanging another word with us. We think the girl must be the by-blow of some fine lady." "Why, then," said I, "how is the child a burthen to you; you are well paid for your care?" "Ay, so we were for eight good years, and then nobody could treat the child better than we did; but for the last two years we have n[illegible]n monk or money." "And since that period, it is evident that nobody could have treated the child worse," rejoined I.

"Why, no, Monsignore; the child is a good child, and we like her well enough; but times are hard, and we have children of our own; and Marguerite, though a good creature in the main, yet is a little hasty now and then." "Hasty, indeed!" quoth I, still rubbing the injured member. I forget what answer the

smith made, for by this time I had begun to contemplate the girl, who watched in trembling anxiety the result of my interference. I thought I had never seen anything so beautiful. There she stood, her long black curls hanging in picturesque dishevelment over her transparent brow; her cheek crimsoned with exertion; her bright eyes shining with redoubled lustre through the crystal tears, which their long silken lashes de[illegible] Her figure, though as yet childish, gave promise of the greatest beauty, when a few years should have developed the characteristics of womanhood. The sight was touching. Suddenly a bright idea flashed upon me. Here was beauty, greater than that which had turned the heads of kings, and influenced the destinies of mankind, kicked and tossed about the world, and cudgelled every day like a jackass. Why should I not stretch out

my talons, and claw up this lovely unappropriated morsel as my own property. Like you, my dear Marquis, I had begun to weary of the trouble and the risk which intrigue required; and yet was too nice to content myself with the beauty which is openly sold in the market to the highest bidder. Here was an admirable opportunity to make my own, an Helen, who, when once seen and known, could not be carried off without encountering a world of fatigue, and outfacing a world of rivals. I might easily take this young girl under my protection, and educate her, until she was as accomplished in mind as she was beautiful in body. The thought was no sooner conceived than executed. I offered Vulcan to take the child off his hands. He gladly caught at the idea. The bargain was soon arranged; and, for the moderate sum of ten crowns, I secured the prize. So much for the story. Now for

the moral. Virtue, you see, is its own reward. My foresight and patience are now about to reap an ample reward. The pretty child has expanded into a beauty fit to drive you mad. And now I hold in my grasp a treasure, which the power of kings might fail to procure.

For where will you find beauty and accomplishment, united to the most perfect innocence, and, from the force of circumstances, ready to surrender without the bribe of matrimony? Do you feel inspired by the spirit of imitation, or is your melancholy so invincible as to incapacitate you from following in my track? Write soon, and send me better news of yourself.

DE FRONSAC.

LETTER II.

My dear Marquis,

So your curiosity is excited by the account which I have given of my Italian

heroine. You want to hear some farther details respecting her character and person. You are desirous to know how I have educated her, and so forth. I have no objection to satisfy your inquiries, though, perhaps, it would have been more prudent to have always maintained silence on the subject. In fact, I experience a strange pleasure in talking about her. What an inconsistent feeling is that which urges us to boast of a treasure, which we most jealously seclude even from the eyes of our most intimate acquaintance. We are well aware, that the knowledge of our possession, at the best, will only excite envy, and will perhaps endanger the safety of our hoard. Still we cannot bridle our exultation, nor refrain from putting forth these hazardous vaunts. Now, then, for some account of Antonia's education. I begin with that which may be called the physical part of it. In this respect, nature had done much for

Antonia, and it was easy to second her efforts. I was determined she should never resemble the sickly, artificial, padded, painted beauties, who totter, for they cannot walk, through the drawing-rooms of Paris. We may compliment such women, when we mingle with them in the illuminated saloon; but, in spite of our affected adoration, we have but little desire to meet them elsewhere. There is no real and permanently pleasing beauty without health and strength. To these points, therefore, I particularly directed the attention of her attendants. Facilities were afforded for every sort of active exercise; and no difficulty was found in inducing the pupil to avail herself of them.

Youthful health delights in activity and motion; and the superabundant vitality of young limbs would no doubt impel girls, as

well as boys, to perpetual muscular exertion, were not the former restrained by the sapient admonitions of some starched governante, who compels them to sit the livelong day as motionless as stone Saints in their niches, under the idea of improving their manners. What a mistake to suppose that exercise renders the figure coarse and clumsily robust! The partial and unvarying exertions required in some of the avocations of the labouring classes, may have this effect; but the spontaneous changing motion of every part of the frame in turn, which is dictated by nature, conduces as much to grace and beauty, as to vigour and health. Well, be this as it may, my system has thriven wonderfully with Antonia. Her every movement is free and unrestrained. Her walk is as easy and graceful as that of a young fawn. Oh! how unlike the stiff, mincing, affected

gait of which the Parisian women are so proud. French tournure, forsooth! certainly very different from nature's tournure, and no doubt very superior. Alas! alas! will there ever arise a race upon this earth, so civilized as to discover that theyca nnot improve upon nature? As for her face, and figure, it is in vain for me to attempt their delineation. The pen cannot describe them—no, nor the pencil neither. If you were a young painter, madly in love for the first time, I would tell you to imagine it, but nobody else could. Eve, when she came fresh from the hands of her Maker, could not have been more beautiful. I gaze on her with an admiration so intense, and perfect, and feel such an unbounded luxury in the contemplation, that I almost sigh to reflect, that a time will come when possession will have dulled the ardour of my feelings. I sometimes think, I

had better admire on for ever, and not risk so fine and delicate a pleasure by seeking a fuller, and more palpable enjoyment. Now turn we to the education of her mind and disposition. For after all, beauty, though an indispensable requisite in a mistress, is not the only, nor even the greatest source of lasting attraction. I—even I—a notorious sensualist—a professed roué—a doater on the voluptuous swell, and rounded contour—even I confess, that it is the power of the mind within, and not the external form—all lovely as it may be—which captivates. By this expression, I do not mean mere intellectual ability—a knowledge of physics, or metaphysics, or a genius for the fine arts. I mean by this term, a double portion of informing spirit—of vitality, which overflows in an intense perception of what is beautiful, and an exquisite sensibility to pleasurable sensations.

Such was the disposition which I wished Antonia to possess. With this object I surrounded her with every thing that would stimulate the imagination, and awaken the senses. The accomplishments, in which I caused her to be instructed, were all made conducive to this end. I took care, indeed, to select masters, who from their age and ugliness were not likely to play the part of Abelard. But, in drawing, the most voluptuous designs and statues were given to her, as models to copy. In music the most melting and soul-subduing airs were chosen for her performance. Books, however, are the agents which exert the most potent influence over a mind brought up in solitude. And what sort of works do you think I gave her? I am almost ashamed to relate my wickedness. I turned her loose into my library, and gave her unlimited access to every author.

Well, where was the harm? I set her in a garden, where there grew wholesome fruits, as well as poisonous plants. The bane and the antidote were both before her. I left her at liberty to choose between what was good, and what was evil; *I* did not bid her hang for hours over the pages of poetry and love: *I* did not suggest to her the study of those comfortable sophists, who swear that practical philosophy consists in the indulgence of our passions. *I* never recommended to her perusal those moral novelists, who, during nine-tenths of their works, excite the imagination by the warmest descriptions, and then think they have sufficiently guarded their readers against the inflammatory effect, by the cold insipid moral contained in the last page. Her will was free; and if the serpent of desire and curiosity coiled round her heart, and stifled her discretion, was

that my fault? Could any christian soul condemn my conduct? But what is the result of the system upon Antonia? Why precisely what you might have anticipated. She is a glorious illustration of what I was vainly endeavouring to explain, in the first part of my letter. She is the most lively and susceptible of human beings. Mind and body are alike strung to the highest pitch of sensibility: the slightest expression of disapprobation will instantly pale the ruby glow of her cheek.—Utter a sound of kindness, or praise, and her quick blushes will tell you more eloquently, than words, how keen a pleasure she experiences. A look will suffice to make her happy or miserable. Her education has been the reverse of that which is generally given to women of rank. The convent is their school; there they are brought up, as it were, in a moral icehouse. Every thing

that can inspire romance, or kindle desire, is rigidly excluded. They grow up as cold as polar plants. The boon promised for their self-restraint is the hope of a splendid alliance. Thus, no strong feeling is allowed to flourish in the bosom. You will nevertheless tell me, that the court of Louis the Sixteenth, is as dissipated as any in Europe. True; but this does not arise from the temperament of the women, but from the license of the times. Examine the motives of these fair libertines, and you will find them to be founded on avarice and vanity. When these feelings are absent, they generally remain chaste—not from the love of virtue, but from the want of passion. Parbleu! I would rather wed St. Anthony's wife of snow, than live tête-à-tête for a week with one of these passionless sinners, or still more passionless prudes. Oh what a contrast

to Antonia! At this moment I am feeding my eyes on her fair proportions. She is playing on the harp. I feel life and warmth communicated to me by her presence, as palpably and as distinctly, as sounds are conveyed to my ears from the instrument which she so gracefully touches. But she has ceased playing, and challenges me to take a walk. I must break off.

DE FRONSAC.

LETTER III.

My dear Marquis,

What do I intend to do with her? Well done, innocence! It is refreshing to hear the libertine of half a century, propound such a pure, simple, naif question, to a brother roué! Do with her? let your own conscience answer the question. What would

you do? or rather what *have* you done, with every pretty girl you were fortunate enough to get within your clutches? But no! you are candid enough to confess, what indeed is notorious to the whole world, that you have been a terrible fellow in your time. But then, it appears, that all your wickedness was committed on the spur of the moment, as occasion tempted you. And as no sinner can endure any but his own peculiar style of vice, you disapprove of my systematic deliberate seduction, coolly premeditated beforehand. But, my virtuous friend, if there is no harm in shooting a pheasant, when you meet it in the field, there can't be much villainy in keeping a preserve. Prithee spare me any farther expostulations on the subject. In the first place, I suspect morality to be a somewhat scarce and precious article with you. It is therefore a pity to waste it upon an incor-

rigible sinner like myself. Secondly, whatever be your amount of the commodity, you certainly need the whole stock for your own private use. Besides, joking apart, all attempts to deter me from the execution of my piquant and well imagined schemes, are useless. If any thing could have won me from my purpose, the manners and conduct of the girl herself would long ago have had that effect. Her feelings towards me exhibit so much pure, genuine affection. Her voice and demeanour, whenever we talk about the future, display such entire and innocent confidence in the goodness and kindness of the fictitious plans I sometimes affect to arrange for her, that I am almost touched. An uneasy compunctious sentiment seems to circle round my heart, and impedes for a moment the due circulation of my blood. But I have only to throw a moment's glance at her rounded arm,

her indescribable ancle, any part, in short, of her angelic figure; and an overwhelming torrent of desire sweeps away the troublesome feeling, with as much ease as a regiment of guards disperse a half-starved mob shouting for bread and liberty. However, as yet, she has been treated kindly; and perhaps gratitude is naturally dictated by the sense of benefits received. But I will tell you what puzzles me, I constantly perceive both in her conversation and actions, strong emotions of pity for vulgar miseries, which it is ridiculous to feel, and bad taste to express; bursts of enthusiasm for a parcel of chimerical virtues, and impossible characters; above all, fanciful traits of what, for want of a better term, I will call conscientiousness, in defence of which she always becomes most amusingly earnest and serious. Now, as she has had no moral pedagogue, no canting governante, set

over her, whose applause it is necessary to win by such ebullitions of virtue, I will confess I am surprised by these traits of character. That she should be accomplished, clever, imaginative, and susceptible, is very natural. These qualities are the direct result of her education. But where the devil did she get her morality from? Not from me certainly, and still less from Madame Gisquette. Neither do I think that the old dolt of a priest, whom I allowed to superintend her religious duties, was the man to teach her these flights. Are then our moral sentiments born with us, and do they constitute a portion of our being? Are they, when naturally strong, able to develope themselves under the most unfavourable circumstances? Are Helvetius, Grimm, D'Holbach, and our other fashionable philosophers, all wrong, when they swear that justice and charity are nothing more than artificial feelings, formed by policy, and

inculcated by education? Can notions of self-denial spring up in the Paphian bower? Can ideas of honesty and generosity develope themselves in a robber's den? Upon the honour of a Duke, when these reflections first crossed my brain, I actually pondered over the matter seriously and heavily for upwards of five minutes, but strange to say, I could not arrive at any satisfactory conclusion of the question. I think I am naturally fond of abstruse topics. Had fate made me a poor devil of a scribbler, compelled to write for his daily bread, I am certain I should have indited a dozen tomes upon this very subject. Thanks to omnipotent Fortune, she has enabled me, by her gifts, to make a better use of my time. But touching these same innate moral feelings, if indeed they have any real existence, I suspect that nature sent me into the world without my fair share of them: for except the slight and transient twinges

which I just now described to you, I never yet felt anything which resembled a conscience. You have well characterized my penchant for the other sex, as my ruling passion. Yes; it is emphatically my ruling passion; and yet you are inconsistent enough to ask me to control its excessive ardour. How rule the ruler? It governs me, you say, and yet you would have me govern it. Is it possible for the smaller power to dominate the greater? It would cease to be my ruling passion if I could overrule it. My appetites are absolute monarchs, and possess the full measure of viciousness and self-will, usually displayed by such personages.

Yes, this passion that you speak of, is indeed the master-feeling of my soul. Like Aaron's rod, it swallows up all the other vices. If I have ever seemed to seek the extension of my influence at Court, be assured it was to gratify an ambitious mistress. If I ever intrigued for

places and pensions, it was because my lavish gifts had for a moment drained my patrimonial resources. No matter which way the ripple on the surface might appear to tend, the true current of my soul always has, and always will, flow in one direction. And you talk to me of changing my pursuits.—Bid a tiger or a vulture refrain from blood, and satisfy their carnivorous maws with fruits and flowers. I must act according to my nature. Other men complain of satiety and weariness: I feel none. Each new beauty seems lovelier than the last; each fresh adventure seems to promise a richer harvest than all its predecessors. Though my whole life has been devoted to pleasure, I have not satisfied a tithe of the innumerable longings of my heart; I have not executed the twentieth part of the caprices and devices of an inexhaustible imagination. And why should I abstain from that which to me is the breath of life—

the essence of my existence? What reason do you give? what reward do you offer? You won't venture to urge religion as a rule of conduct, to a French nobleman, in the year seventeen hundred and eighty eight? But even did I believe in the common people's creed, its hopes and promises would exercise but little influence on my mind. I can scarcely conceive, and do not at all envy, the metaphysical delights of disembodied spirits. For the possibility of obtaining such airy uncertainties, I should certainly never forego the palpable joys of this visible diurnal sphere. Mahomet's paradise might indeed have tempted me. As to morality, if I am so constituted as to derive more pleasure from the gratification of my passions, than the satisfaction of my conscience, the fault is in nature, not in myself. My mental conformation is vicious, and my acts correspond to my organization. With respect

to law and opinion—I keep within the letter of the first; and as to the second, I am satisfied with that portion of esteem, which, in a profligate age, rank and riches will extort for me, in spite of the utmost licentiousness, from my contemporaries. Thus, you see my heart is cased in triple armour. There is not a single vulnerable part where your shafts can enter. No—Antonia's fate is settled. If the career I have marked out for her, be compatible with what she dreams happiness—well and good—I am heartily glad of it; but if it be not—why, her fate is still fixed. Your remonstrances have actually hardened me in my resolution; for, out of compliment to you, I have weighed them in the balance of reason, and found them wanting.

DE FRONSAC.

END OF VOL. I.

